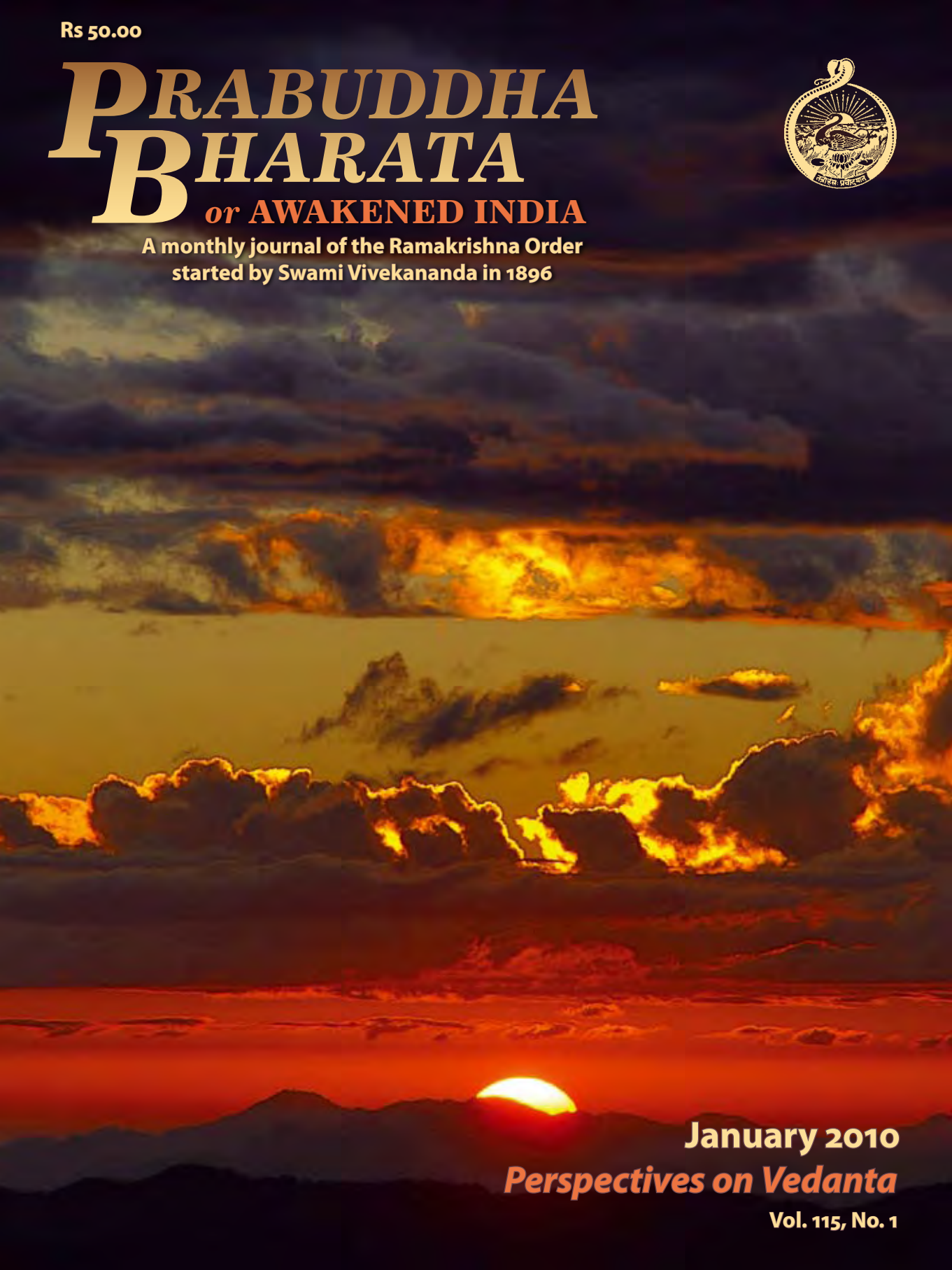


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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



January 2010

Perspectives on Vedanta

Vol. 115, No. 1

THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Sri Ramakrishna* *The World Teacher*



My Master taught me this lesson hundreds of times, yet I often forget it. Few understand the power of thought. If a man goes into a cave, shuts himself in, and thinks one really great thought and dies, that thought will penetrate the walls of that cave, vibrate through space, and at last permeate the whole human race. Such is the power of thought; be in no hurry therefore to give your thoughts to others. First have something to give. He alone teaches who has something to give, for teaching is not talking, teaching is not imparting doctrines, it is communicating. Spirituality can be communicated just as really as I can give you a flower. This is true in the most literal sense. This idea is very old in India and finds illustration in the West in the theory, in the belief, of apostolic succession. Therefore, first make character—that is the highest duty you can perform. Know Truth for yourself, and there will be many to whom you can teach it afterwards; they will all come. This was the attitude of my Master. He criticised no one. For years I lived with that man, but never did I hear those lips utter one word of condemnation for any sect. He had the same sympathy for all sects; he had found the harmony between them. A man may be intellectual, or devotional, or mystic, or active; the various religions represent one

or the other of these types. Yet it is possible to combine all the four in one man, and this is what future humanity is going to do. That was his idea. He condemned no one, but saw the good in all.

People came by thousands to see this wonderful man who spoke in a patois, every word of which was forceful and instinct with light. For it is not what is spoken, much less the language in which it is spoken, but it is the personality of the speaker which dwells in everything he says that carries weight. Every one of us feels this at times. We hear most splendid orations, most wonderfully reasoned-out discourses, and we go home and forget them all. At other times we hear a few words in the simplest of language, and they enter into our lives, become part and parcel of ourselves and produce lasting results. The words of a man who can put his personality into them take effect, but he must have tremendous personality. All teaching implies giving and taking, the teacher gives and the taught receives, but the one must have something to give, and the other must be open to receive.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*,
4:177.



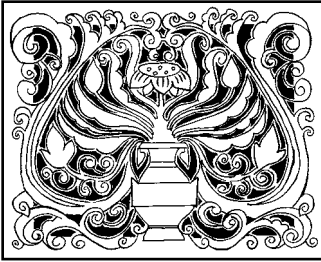
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TO OUR READERS

VEDANTA IS THE MESSAGE of unity of existence and divinity of the human soul. Though impersonal in its basis, it accepts any number of spiritual personalities. In recognizing the spiritual unity of all existence it shows us the true basis of universal ethics. In reminding us of our divinity, and showing us the way to manifest it, it opens for us the doors to genuine freedom and gives us a taste of the immortal joy that is our true nature.

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Prabuddha Bharata is committed to the dissemination of the message of Vedanta. But we still have to walk a long way before we realize Swamiji's dream of a Vedantic society. This special number takes a look at some of the fundamental issues in Vedanta—including several that are largely technical—to remind us of the spiritual and philosophical bases of Vedanta. It is for us to utilize these insights for greater social activism on Vedantic lines.

With this number the *Prabuddha Bharata* enters its hundred and fifteenth year. We take this opportunity to greet and thank all of you—our readers, contributors, reviewers, advertisers, and well-wishers—who have been helping us reach out to a global audience. We invite you to continue actively participating in our effort to deliver the message of Vedanta to more people—by writing for us, becoming our patrons, gifting the magazine to friends, libraries, and institutions, and contributing to our corpus fund. We, in turn, hope to serve you better.

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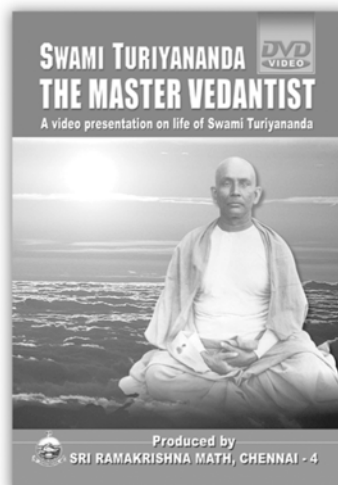
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Facets of Vedanta

January 2010

Vol. 115, No. 1

वेदान्तसिद्धान्तनिरुक्तिरेषा ब्रह्मैव जीवः सकलं जगच्च ।
अखण्डरूपस्थितिरेव मोक्षो ब्रह्माद्वितीये श्रुतयः प्रमाणम् ॥

This is the conclusive statement of Vedanta: The jiva and the whole universe are nothing but Brahman, and that liberation means abiding in the indivisible Reality (Brahman). The Vedas are testimony to the non-duality of Brahman.

(Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, 478)

तदेवं परस्य ब्रह्मणः अनवधिकातिशयासंख्येयकल्याणगुणाकरस्य निरवद्यस्य
अनन्तमहाविभूतेः अनवधिकातिशयसौशील्यवात्सल्यसौन्दर्यजलधेः सर्वशेषित्वात्
आत्मनः शेषत्वात् प्रतिसम्बन्धितया अनुसन्धीयमानम् अनवधिकातिशयप्रीतिविषयं
सत् परं ब्रह्मैव एनमात्मानं प्रापयति इति ।

Thus, as the supreme Brahman—who is the inexhaustible mine of innumerable auspicious qualities unsurpassable in excellence, who is free from evil, who is possessed of infinite glorious powers, who is the boundless ocean of amiability, affection, and beauty, who is the whole with the individual selves as his parts (and thus subservient to him)—is meditated upon as being related (to the individual self), he becomes the object of unsurpassed love and himself leads the individual soul to Brahman (his own self).

(Ramanujacharya, *Vedartha-sangraha*, 243)

श्रीमन्मध्वमते हरिः परतमः सत्यं जगत्तत्त्वतो
भेदो जीवगणा हरेरनुचरा नीचोच्चभावं गताः ।
मुक्तिर्नैजसुखानुभूतिरमला भक्तिश्च तत्साधनम्
अक्षादित्रितयं प्रमाणमखिलात्मनायैकवेद्यो हरिः ॥

According to Madhvacharya, Sri Hari is the Supreme Being and the world truly real. The individual souls are different from and subservient to Hari, and are also mutually distinct. Mukti is the experience of pure bliss (in the presence of Hari) and bhakti the means to it. Perception, inference, and the Vedas are the means of valid knowledge, (but) the knowledge of Hari is available only through the Vedas.

EDITORIAL

Living Vedanta

AT THE BEGINNING OF A COSMIC CYCLE of Creation, the Bhagavata tells us, the latent energies of the Supreme Being burst forth as a lotus bud bearing the Creator Brahma. Brahma looked around to find only a vast expanse of causal waters and wondered: ‘Who am I seated on this lotus; where has this lotus come from? It must surely have a basis.’ He dived into the waters through the lotus stalk, searching for his origin, but found his search unending even after aeons. He then returned to his seat, controlled his mind and senses, looked deep within himself and discovered ‘the truth of the indwelling Spirit, which he had failed to realize through his earlier quest outside.’

Brahma’s story keeps repeating itself in the lives of numerous seekers of truth. The boundless expanse of external space, with its seemingly unending material content, seems to be the closest thing to the infinitude that Vedanta speaks of as Brahman. Moreover, if Brahman is the basis of all Creation, we should surely be able to reach it in and through this created world that we objectively perceive. Unfortunately, we tend to forget that space and time, as we perceive them, are as much products of our own mind as they are the constitutive components of the external world. Contemporary physicists specializing in string theories tell us that the universe has many more dimensions than what we are able to physically see. Even causal connections that we see in the external world are framed by our minds. The Newtonian concept of gravity as a force acting at a distance and the Einsteinian concept of gravity warping the very fabric of space and time are radically different causal explanations of the same phenomenon, each possessing great empirical accuracy.

We may not be able to see the numerous phys-

ical dimensions that string theorists posit, but, given sufficient grounding in mathematics, we can check the logical coherence of the mathematical models to convince ourselves of the plausibility of their claims. Our conviction would be further strengthened if we find predictions based on these models come true. The string theories and their multiple dimensions will, however, continue to remain in our minds.

The mind—Vedantins choose to speak of it as *antahkarana*, inner organ—is also of pivotal importance in our quest through the spiritual realm. The objective external world, Advaitins say, is an *adhyasa*, superimposition, on Brahman. And this *adhyasa* is taking place not in the external world—which is actually a product of *adhyasa*—but in our own Self. And our mind is not only the gateway to this Self but is also identified with it, delimiting its infinitude and making each of us the little selves we imagine ourselves to be. That this superimposition takes place in the very core of our being is the reason why we find it so hard to believe the Advaitic claim of our individuality and the external world being ‘unreal’ or ‘illusory’.

‘An illusion’, the eminent philosopher K C Bhattacharya reminds us, ‘unlike a thinking error, excites wonder as it is corrected. One’s apprehension of something as illusory involves a peculiar feeling of the scales falling from the eyes. To be aware of our individuality as illusory would be then to wonder how we could feel as an individual at all. ... Even to understand the position, we have to refer to some spiritual experience in which we feel an abrupt break with our past and wonder how we could be what we were.’

Experience is the test of lived spirituality. ‘The notion of *adhyasa* or the false identification with

the self and the body would never occur to a person who has no experience of himself as a spirit and of the object as distinct from the subject, as another person is from oneself. It is only one who felt such a distinction of the self and the body that would wonder at his own implicit belief in their identity.' Even devotional schools of Vedanta agree that one must realize oneself as spirit before one can successfully realize the Divine, who is Spirit.

Are there more mundane experiences that give us a glimpse of *adhyasa*? The Bhagavadgita notes that 'dwelling on sense objects leads to attachment; attachment gives rise to desire, and desire breeds anger. Anger generates delusion, and delusion results in loss of memory; from loss of memory, destruction of discernment, and loss of discernment spells the person's ruin.' Lust and anger are two emotions that can completely hijack one's body and mind: When a person first abuses me, I know I am going to be angry. Anger is one thing, I another; but before I realize it, I am turned into anger itself.

However, those attempting to control lust and anger notice something interesting: Our psychophysical system cannot sustain a strong upsurge of lust or anger for long; allowed time, both drop away as rapidly as they arise, albeit only to rise again a little later. This total identification with lust and anger is an *adhyasa*; to the thoughtful, the subsequent release from their spell should provide insight into the 'illusory' nature of their identity with one's self.

But how do we break free from this *adhyasa*? The Gita itself shows the way in the case of lust and anger: 'One who is able to withstand the force of lust and anger even here before quitting the body is a yogi; he is happy man.' A mind overpowered by lust or anger is in a state of *moha*, delusion; and delusion is characterized by loss of discernment and paralysis of willpower. The only course possible is to attempt standing the surge without acting on it. Every time we manage to do this successfully, the instinctual network of samskaras orchestrating this upsurge gets a wee bit weaker. That is the reason why *vairagya*, detachment, and *titiksha*, fortitude, are fundamental requisites for the pursuit of Vedanta. If we allow

the senses to be carried away by the external world, which is a product of *adhyasa*, we cannot know the reality of our Self, which the *adhyasa* swamps.

Are we then to spend our lives running away from the world? Far from it. *Viveka*, discernment, and *samadhana*, meditative inwardness, can help us tap the powers of our true Self and act as true masters of the objective world. In *Kashi Panchaka*, his hymn to the Kashi that is Consciousness, Acharya Shankara says: 'This body is the land of Kashi, knowledge (of Self) the Ganga that spans the three worlds, bhakti and faith the Gaya here, contemplative union with one's guru's feet the confluence of Prayag, and the transcendental Turiya, the inner Self that is the witness of all minds, the master of the entire universe—if all these reside in my own body, then what else is a *tirtha*, a sacred abode.'

The acharya's vision, Sri Ramakrishna would tell us, is that of a *vijnani*, one who has attained the knowledge of Brahman and sees only Brahman where others see an objective material world. To spiritual aspirants, this vision is a subject of contemplation and practice, for 'the very states that are the marks of realized souls are also the attitudes and conduct to be carefully nurtured by striving aspirants'. *Manana*, reflection, and *nididhyasana*, contemplation, on Vedantic statements asserting the true nature of the Self within—*tat-tvam-asi*, *aham-brahmasmi*, and the like—leads to *vasana-kshaya*, destruction of the samskaras that keep reminding us of the reality of the external world, and *manonasha*, dissolution of the mind, as it is overtaken by the *akhandakara vritti*, unitary state, of Brahman awareness. To the prepared mind, *shravana*, the very hearing of Vedantic truth, dispels the ignorance that presents the empirical self and the world as entities distinct from the Self. Such spiritual souls are 'the pure sattvikas, who can never make any stir, but only melt down in love'. 'Hundreds of these unknown heroes', Swami Vivekananda tells us, 'have lived in every country working silently. ... And in time their thoughts find expression in Buddhas or Christs.' It is to these silent Vedantins that we dedicate this number.



Prabuddha Bharata—100 years ago

BEAUTY, SEEN AND UNSEEN: *January 1910*

“**T**o live poetry” they say “is better than to be a poet.” Poet, nature’s darling, is fed by the silent flow of rapture which swells her breast, and is put to a calm repose under the lustrous beam of her tender eyes. At times, before his dreamy wondering gaze, she unfolds her raiment of varied hues modulated with tints of unspeakable softness and his eyes become luxuriously bathed with the hidden glow of her sparkling beauty—nay more, with every pulsation of his he counts the throbbings of her heart and wonders how they rise quite in unison with his own; his very life borrows the warmth from hers, his heart fills with feelings that are hers; his whole mind reverberates with the mute music that is hers through eternity! He feels blessed, and in his tattered rags holds the pomp of Emperors to ridicule!

And lo! There sits the man with his contented face and serene air, raising a cloud of halo around of rare light and charm—in that never-frequented avenue embosomed in some dark maze of a deep forest, haunted by beasts alone in their native pranks and filled with the sweet lives of little feathery beings aloft—know you who he is? He belongs to that old type of Aryan Rishihood, a line of seers immortal! World never knows of him and may be, man never hears him speak; yet his silence utters a voice that tells. World is naught to him with its pain and pleasure; but his meditative eyes are beaming with gladness that is not of this world, his whole frame seems to be a lining symbolism of happiness of some other and better Existence! The aura of glory that shines around him is the external reflection of the light that is in him within—and Ah, what light! Who can sound the waves of bright thoughts in which his soul is merged? Yet, if one has ears to

hear the hallowed words that his silence speaks, one would listen “oh world, stand aside for a while with all thy vanities and fears and let me alone to look to my Beautiful One!” Now, is It that Nature which the poet worships with such adoration? Is it that beauty, of which his fancy’s pencil draws such a life-like portrait for those who have no eyes to see? Aye, is it that beauty that melts into melody so charming through his mystic lyre? Is it the same? Perhaps, not! For never have we seen a poet who is so mad for his ideal, as to unify his whole self with that which he worships and for which he gives up all that the world has to give of pleasures and enjoyments. But here is a man whose life proclaims:

“He thought it happier to be dead,

To die for beauty, than live for bread.”

His meditation of the Beautiful has dragged him out from the trinket-show of the world; and he deems it a privilege now, to lay his life down as an oblation in Its grand altar-fire. His inner nature has been so touched with his ideal that his whole self has become fused with it! Poet lives for beauty, but the seer lives in beauty—to the latter the price of worshipping the Beautiful is entire self-dissolution. Then can we say any more that the beauty which he worships, is that of the Nature whom the poet adores!

Beauty is the perception of harmony by the mind; and harmony is the unifying principle in variety. Hence the perception of beauty can justly be called to be the perception by the mind of Unity in variety. The poet sees this in flashes now and then in the skirt of Nature and calls it the “beautiful”. But this beauty of Nature which he sees and feels is the least part of what she hides. The glorious Usha (dawn)

and her virgin purity, the emerald-charm of noon-day sky, the auric splendour of the setting sun, on his crimson robe of fleecy clouds, the mystic calm of sombre night, are all sought after by the poet with eagerness; but they help to show in mere flashes, the vision of this unity throughout nature, and at the same time mock us with their transiency and leave us to ask—are these glimpses real? The dash of glory that the morning sun pours upon yonder spangling snow is marvellous indeed to make one feel one's self to be in harmony with it but who ever can clutch it and keep the feeling for all times? It is like a mirage, "a meteor-happiness that shuns human grasp!" And where is the poet who knows whether or not, a perpetual gala is spread behind that veil, which can be perceived through the beatific vision of the Supreme Unity that rests under all these diverse appearances of harmony in nature? That indeed is the grand harmony in the concert that nature plays in all ages and climes! That is the perennial fountain of beauty in which the seer drinks deep, days and nights! Unseen by the world, yet it shines through all that is beautiful in nature! And, when one absorbs one's self fully in it one perceives the Supreme One, the essence of all beauty and bliss and attraction as standing at the back of the universe through all eternity! It happened so with our Vedic Rishis of old and can really happen again even now—for the universe is indeed the great *Pratika* of the Supreme One. This vision of the Beautiful elevates and takes one out of the little grooves of one's little self and makes one feel to be one with creation. And all things considered, is not our whole existence a search after That—that Object of beauty which is *really* a perpetual joy?

If passion for solitude has ever led your steps to the lonely shore of a sea-girt isle where the angry breaker lashes the rocks around filling the air with wild echoes, and made you linger there until the sun's broad disc seemed resting on the burnished wave—or on some sleepless night, if ever you have been under the open sky and pondered over the millions of constellations tinged with infinite colours, swirling through the boundless space in the midst of that immense concave, those flashing incessant meteors, and the whole stellar

world running in that endless race—or grander still, if ever you have seen the beautiful expression of a beautiful face reflecting the purity of the inner heart and diving deep under the surface have lost yourself to consider the infinity within—your soul must have been held entranced to feel that all these are but links in a great harmony rising out of a grand Universal Mind and these various display of beauties are only imperfect expressions of the joy that constitutes Its self which is at once infinite and beyond all comprehension! You must have felt at the moment that your spirit had flown above matter's realm and been standing face to face with the ocean of unconditional bliss! And before that fulness of beauty your overflowing heart must have come to your lips to cry with joy:

अहो निमग्नस्ता रूपसिन्धौ पश्यामि
नान्तं न च मध्यमादिम् ।
अवाक् च निस्पन्दतरे विमूढः कुत्रास्मि
कोस्मीति न वेद्मि देव ॥

"Oh, I am merged in the sea of that Beauty; I see neither its end nor its beginning, nor its middle. I am speechless and overpowered, I am losing all sensation of the body; I do not know, O Lord, where I am, or who I am."

That indeed is a glimpse of the *Bhuma chit*—the consciousness absolute, whom the "pure in heart sees in every atom in the universe. This is the unseen Beauty of all beauties! This perception of the beauty of the Universal Mind fills the cosmos with a glory, in which the dull glimmer of the vilest thing even dares not touch a note of discord!

Such is the cognition of the *Bhuma*, the beauty and grandeur of the Being, which becomes tarnished indefinitely by the finite nature of our senses and mind. Judge now, Oh man! Whether this perverted gross forms of *Maya* can be so heart-ravishing—ponder, how infinitely maddening must be the untrammelled, untainted, transcendental beauty of the real Self of the Being!

तावानस्य महिमातो ज्यायांश्च पूरुषः ।

"Though to such extent is the manifestation of His glory, yet much greater is the Being Himself."

It is indeed the endless ocean of nectar, an inexhaustible store of Beauty, tasted and seen by only a blessed few! "Drinking a few drops of it the God of all gods and the spiritual guide of all has lost His Self in the conscious calm of eternal *samadhi*; seeing the sparkle of the waves of this Universal Mind (Bhuma) at a distance, the Devarshi Narada has become frantic with ecstasy and roams ever through the universe

singing Its glory; whilst the born-free Sukadeva, touching and sprinkling over himself a few drops of Which has attained to that innocence which can never be touched and roams all over the world respected by all, speaking and preaching of That alone!" "Incarnations, like Rama, Krishna, Buddha and others are hanging like seeds, in bunches, on the branches of that Sachchidananda tree!"

OCCASIONAL NOTES

The ideal is always infinite, always divine. A highly moralised society produces the greatest saints. The purity of fathers and mothers makes possible the birth of Avatars. Where marriage is faithfully kept, there sincere *Sannyas* is possible, not amongst profligates and riotous livers. Similarly, the presence of honourable citizens is necessary to the maintenance of a grand religious ideal, and the citizen is as necessary to its manifestation as the monk.

But if this is so, we have to search our ancient scriptures with a new aim. We must seek for all that can support and encourage us in doing manfully the work of this present world. Renunciation can be achieved through duty quite as well as by the abandonment of duty. We have thousands of texts to tell us so, but the prevailing preconception in favour of *Sannyas* has led

to our ignoring all that favours *dharma*. ...

The reason lies largely in the fact that when our texts were formulated our society was rich in virtue as in material resources. When the last of these deserts us, it is difficult to prevent the decay of the former; and what is wanted today is a deliberate recapture of both.

For this, we must exalt work. We must look upon the world as a school, in which it is worth while to strive for promotion from class to class. We must set our shoulder to the wheel and struggle unceasingly to attain the end we have set before ourselves. Our philosophy tells us that absolute progress is impossible, in the things of this life. But relative progress is fully possible; and while we move on this plane of relativity, we must work as if perfection would reward the very next step.

A HINT OF LIFE

Don't look for the flaws as you go through life;
And, even when you find them,
It is wise and kind to be somewhat blind,
And look for the virtues behind them.
For the cloudiest night has a hint of light
Somewhere in the shadows hiding.
It is better by far to hunt for a star
Than the spot on the sun abiding.

The world will never adjust itself
To suit your whims to the letter.
Some thing must go wrong your whole life long;
And the sooner you know it, the better.
It is folly to fight with the Infinite,
And go under at last in the wrestle;
The wiser man shapes into God's good plan,
As the water shapes into a vessel.

ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

Vedanta for Life and Living

Swami Smaranananda

EVERY MEMBER OF SOCIETY needs to have a viable philosophy to serve as a guide in day-to-day life. The absence of such a philosophy has led humankind into countless conflicts. The human being is generally taken to be the highest product of evolution. But does evolution stop with humans, or are there further possibilities? There should certainly be further future possibilities, but future evolution is more likely to be on the mental, intellectual, and spiritual planes than physical.

Swami Vivekananda says: ‘That society is the greatest, where the highest truths become practical.’ How can this be done? The thoughts of Vedanta are thousands of years old, but they were organized into a philosophical system for the first time by Sri Shankaracharya in the eighth century. Since then various other systems of Vedanta were developed. Though Advaita became the most important system of philosophy in India, there were many dualistic systems, of which Sri Ramanuja’s qualified monism, Vishishtadvaita, was the most prominent.

But all these philosophical systems remained confined to scholars. They were not in any way related to the life of common people. These philosophies could not show a path for everyday life. Vedanta epistemology and ontology have been discussed for centuries, but their practical application in day-to-day life was not seriously attempted.

It was Swami Vivekananda who first brought the message of Advaita Vedanta to the common people in modern times, presenting its essential features in a simple way and working out the means to apply these to daily life. He showed how Vedantic principles form the basis of genuine spiritual life and natural

morality and ethics. Its universal nature makes Vedanta eminently suitable to the modern world, and its great existential importance lies in releasing the individual from self-imposed bondages in society. Vedanta has great potential for restructuring society, a promise that is yet to be adequately tapped.

Vedanta is essentially a spiritual philosophy. The ancients tried to discover the Truth externally. Finding it impossible to do so, they turned their sight inward. As the *Katha Upanishad* says: ‘The self-existent (God) has rendered the senses defective; and so they go outward, hence humans see the external world and not the internal Self. Perchance some wise person desirous of immortality turned his eyes inward and beheld the Atman.’

The seers also wanted to find answers to certain fundamental questions: ‘What is the ultimate cause? Whence are we born? Why do we live? Where is our final rest? O knowers of Brahman, under whose orders are we subject to the laws of happiness and misery?’ Practising the method of meditation, they realized that Being who is the God of religion, the Self of philosophy, and the Energy of science—who exists as the self-luminous power in everyone. Various schools of thought propounded their ideas about this Self, laying down Vedantic principles in the process. These ought to form the basis for practical life.

What are these principles? First is the necessity of a well-defined goal of life. No philosophy can be widely applicable unless it is based on universal principles. Vedanta fulfils this requirement. Its central quest relates to the human being per se. It draws attention to the fact that in the innermost core of the human personality is the Atman, the Self, which is the conscious principle behind all the variegated phenomena. The Atman is not confined to any particular race or religion. As the *Shvetashvatara*

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Upanishad puts it: 'It is neither man, nor woman, nor a eunuch. It gets associated with whichever material body it takes up.' Brahman is both transcendent and immanent. Any person can get rid of fear by knowing that the Self, without birth or death, is one's innermost reality.

However much one may master external nature, till one realizes the Reality within, one remains within the field of relativity. According to Vedanta, the purpose of human life is to make it possible for everyone to realize this highest truth. That alone can make life purposeful. So, while retaining all the facilities that have been brought to our doors, the ordinary individual has to learn how to bring these to serve the highest purpose of human life: discovery of the Truth which underlies this phenomenal existence. That can be done only by turning our sight within. Today the world is struggling to discover peace in the midst of turbulence and chaos. We humans are responsible for this predicament. And it is we again who will have to find ways to attain peace. Vedanta shows us how this can be done through its positive message of inner strength.

Swami Vivekananda observed that Advaita, which was the crest-jewel of all philosophies in India, was alienated from the common people: 'But one defect which lay in the Advaita was its being worked out so long on the spiritual plane only, and nowhere else; now the time has come when you have to make it practical. ... it shall no more live with monks in caves and forests, and in the Himalayas; it must come down to the daily, everyday life of the people.' He further says: 'The secret of Advaita is: Believe in yourselves first, and then believe in anything else. In the history of the world, you will find that only those nations that have believed in themselves have become great and strong.'

Vedanta fulfils the need for a universal philosophy. It is rational in its approach and embraces the whole of existence. It is not confined to any race, caste, creed, or community. Since it transcends all empirical knowledge, it is not restrained by time, space, or causality. It gives humans hope and strength, fearlessness and same-sightedness. It does not discriminate

on the basis of sex, colour, caste, or creed, since it does not make the body the most important entity in life. The Atman is the true basis of all existence.

While searching for Reality, we are to reject one by one all that we perceive and experience as limited: *neti, neti*. We want to find whether there is anything that is timeless and beyond destruction. Thus we are to transcend the senses and their objects. Then shall we find that what is transcendent is also immanent. This Reality pervades everything. At the back of everything dwells the Infinite. We shall also find that the microcosm and the macrocosm are the same Reality, perceived from different angles of vision.

Knowledge, as we understand it, is all objectification. It provides only a limited vision of Reality. In the contemporary world many educated people are trying to make life amoral. But without a moral or ethical base to guide individual and social behaviour, life can never be happy and peaceful. Therefore, we need a philosophy that bases itself on a moral ideal. As the saying goes:

*Ācāra-hīnam na punanti vedāḥ
yadyapy-adhītāḥ saha ṣaḍbhīr-aṅgaib;
Chandāmsy-enam mṛtyu-kāle tyajanti
nīdam śakuntā iva jāta-pakṣāḥ.*

One without proper conduct is not purified by the Vedas, even if they study them all, along with their six auxiliaries. All the Vedas leave them at the time of death, just as the Shakunta leave their nest once their wings have grown.

Vedantic morality is based on the unity and universality of the Atman. Instead of weakening people by frightening them into following a religious path, Vedanta tells that humans need not think themselves weak, for the Atman is an infinite source of strength. Moreover, as the *Mundaka Upanishad* says, 'Nāyamātmā balahīnena labhyaḥ'; this Atman is not to be realized by the weak.' Vedanta, therefore, provides a philosophy and religion that brings out one's higher qualities and provides the wherewithal to face the realities of life with strength and hope, peace and tranquillity. A society peopled by authentic Vedantins would surely be a blessing unto itself. ❧

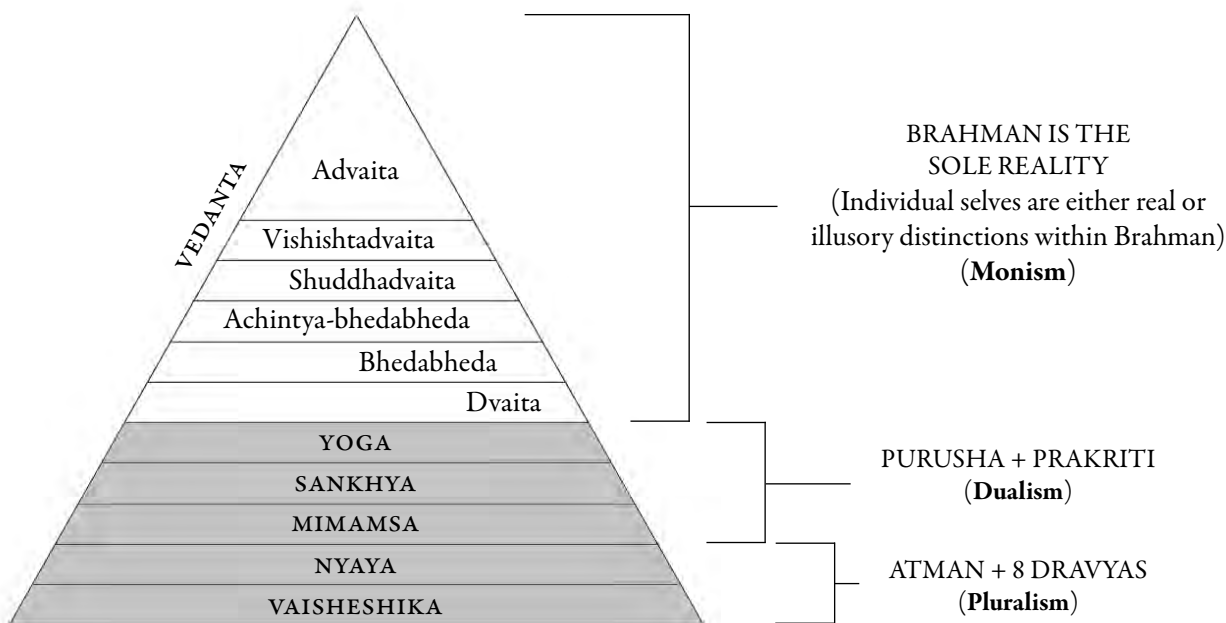
Four Basic Principles of Advaita Vedanta

Swami Bhajanananda

ADVAITA VEDANTA is the dominant and most well-known school of Indian philosophy. In Indian culture *darśana* is the word which corresponds to the Western idea of 'philosophy'. *Darśana* literally means vision or insight. There are six *darśanas*, each of which provides a particular view of, or insight into, Reality. From the standpoint of the principle of harmony taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the six *darśanas* may be regarded as forming a six-tiered pyramid, the tiers providing higher and higher views of Reality, with Vedanta as the topmost tier. Vedanta itself consists of several schools. These schools of Vedanta may also be visualized as forming a pyra-

mid with Advaita occupying its pinnacle.

Vedanta, however, is not a mere *view of Reality*; it is also a *way of life*—not ordinary life, but spiritual life. Its aim is to enable human beings to solve the existential problems of life, transcend human limitations, go beyond suffering, and attain supreme fulfilment and peace. Although there are six *darśanas*, Vedanta alone has remained the philosophy of the Hindu religious tradition from very ancient times to the present day. Of the different schools of Vedanta, Advaita has for its domain the mainstream Hinduism, whereas the other schools of Vedanta are associated with the different sects of Hinduism.



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Preliminary Considerations

Before taking up a study of the basic principles of Advaita Vedanta it is necessary to keep in mind two points. One is the distinction between Advaita as an experience and Advaita as a philosophy. As a direct transcendental spiritual experience, Advaita marks the highest point of spiritual realization a human being can attain. In that climactic experience the distinction between the individual and the cosmic is lost, and the distinctions between the knower, the thing known, and knowledge disappear. It is 'Advaita as experience' that forms the main theme of the Upanishads. 'Advaita as a philosophy' is a conceptual framework that attempts to explain how the impersonal Absolute appears as the phenomenal world and individual selves. The twelfth-century Advaita writer Sriharsha says in the introduction to his famous work *Khandana-khanda-khadya* that the purpose of philosophy, *śāstrārtha*, is to determine the nature of truth, *tattva-nirṇaya*, and victory over the opponent, *vādi-vijaya*. Acharya Shankara himself devotes a considerable part of his commentaries to refuting the views of opponents. In the present article we confine our discussion to the philosophical aspect of Advaita.

The second point to be kept in mind is that, although Advaita philosophy is built on the immutable and indestructible foundation of timeless truths and laws, its superstructure of concepts underwent several changes during different periods in the history of Hinduism. Four main phases may be seen in the development of Advaita philosophy.

i) Advaita of the Upanishads • As stated earlier, this is the experiential aspect of Advaita.

ii) Advaita of Shankara • It is well known that the edifice of Advaita philosophy, which towers over all other systems of philosophy, was built by Acharya Shankara in the eighth century. Shankara's main endeavour was to establish the non-dual nature of Brahman as the ultimate Reality. His most original contribution, however, was the introduction of the concept of a cosmic negative principle known as *maya* or *ajñāna*, ig-

norance, in order to explain the origin of the universe and the existence of duality in the phenomenal world without affecting the non-dual nature of Brahman.

iii) Post-Shankara Advaita • This phase extends over a long period, from the ninth century to the sixteenth. The writers on Advaita Vedanta of this period include eminent thinkers like Padmapada, Sureshwara, Vachaspati, Prakashatman, Vimuktatman, Sarvajnatman, Sriharsha, Chitsukha, Madhusudana, and others, who added several new concepts into the philosophical framework of Advaita Vedanta. During this period Advaita Vedanta split into three streams or schools. These are: (a) the Vartika school, based on the views of Sureshwara; (b) the Vivarana school, based on the views of Padmapada and Prakashatman; and (c) the Bhamati school, based on the views of Vachaspati Mishra. The philosophy of Advaita underwent great refinement and intellectual sophistry during the post-Shankara phase. However, the focus of discussions shifted from Brahman to *maya* or *ajñāna*.

iv) The Modern Phase of Advaita • The modern phase in the development of Advaita Vedanta was inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. They introduced several important changes in the understanding of Advaita in order to make it more relevant to the needs and conditions of the modern world. Some of the changes brought about by them are briefly stated below.

(a) The experiential aspect of Vedanta has come to be stressed, as it was during the Vedic period, more than the philosophical aspect.

(b) Harmony of the Advaitic view with the views of other schools of Vedanta has been established by accepting all views as representing different stages in the realization of Brahman. This has put an end to unnecessary polemical attacks and sectarian squabbles within the fold of Vedanta.

(c) The older form of Advaita gave greater importance to the transcendent aspect of Brahman, whereas the new view on Advaita gives greater importance to the immanent aspect.

(d) Swami Vivekananda found immense practical significance for Advaita Vedanta in solving the individual and collective problems of day-to-day life. Swamiji has shown how Advaitic knowledge can serve as the basis of morality, basis of inner strength and courage, and as the basis for social justice and equality as well. Above all, Advaita provides the basis for Sri Ramakrishna's message of 'service to man as service to God', *śivajñāne jīva-sevā*, which Swami Vivekananda popularized as the new gospel of social service. All the service activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission are inspired by this gospel of service.

(e) Swami Vivekananda has brought about the reconciliation of Advaita Vedanta with modern science. Furthermore, Swamiji showed that Vedanta itself is a science—the science of consciousness.

(f) Swamiji isolated the universal principles of Advaita Vedanta from the mythological, institutional, and cultic aspects of its parent matrix in Hinduism and converted the universal principles of Advaita into a universal religion—which in the modern idiom means universal spirituality—for all humanity.

The philosophical presuppositions and metaphysical underpinnings and implications of this 'Neo-Vedanta', which is better called 'Integral Vedanta', are yet to be worked out, or even studied, properly. Everything goes to show that the principles of Vedanta developed by Swami Vivekananda are likely to have a great impact on world thought, global culture, and human progress in the coming decades and centuries of the third millennium.

The aim of the present article is to explicate the main principles of Advaita Vedanta developed during the post-Shankara period. A proper understanding of these basic principles is necessary to understand and evaluate the status, influence, and possibilities of Vedanta in the modern world and the contributions made to it by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Post-Shankara Advaita Vedanta rests on four foundational principles: (i) the illusoriness of *jīvatva*, individuality; (ii) a two-level reality;

(iii) *ajñāna* as the conjoint cause of the world; and (iv) the non-duality of Consciousness.

The Illusoriness of Individuality

By Advaita is meant the non-duality of Brahman, or rather the denial of duality in Brahman. The central concept of Vedanta *darśana* is that Brahman is the ultimate cause of the universe and the ultimate Reality. This is accepted by all schools of Vedanta—dualistic as well as non-dualistic. What then is the difference between Dvaita and Advaita? One basic difference is that according to dualistic schools individuality is real and persists even in the state of mukti, whereas in Advaita individuality is unreal and does not persist in the state of mukti. Shankara says: 'What is called jiva is not absolutely different from Brahman. Brahman itself, being conditioned by adjuncts such as *buddhi*, intellect, and the like, comes to be called "doer" and "experiencer".'¹ 'The difference between the individual self and the supreme Self is due to the presence of limiting adjuncts, such as the body, which are set up by names and forms and are created by *avidyā*; there is actually no difference.'²

In the dualistic schools the word 'Atman' is used to refer only to the individual self, and not to Brahman. When the Atman identifies itself with mind and body, it is called jiva. In the state of mukti this identification disappears, but the Atman, although it becomes almost similar to Brahman, remains distinct and separate from Brahman. Here, the relationship between Atman and Brahman is an organic relationship, like that between the part and the whole. The type of difference that exists between Brahman and the individual selves is known as *svagata-bheda*.³

Advaita denies *svagata-bheda* in Brahman. According to Advaita, in the state of mukti the Atman does not remain distinct from Brahman but becomes one with it. In fact, there is no distinction between Atman and Brahman; as soon as the identification with mind and body disappears, the distinction between Atman and Brahman also disappears. Hence, Advaitins use the terms Atman

and Brahman interchangeably.

We may conclude this section with a statement made by Krishnachandra Bhattacharya, one of the original thinkers and great scholars of Indian philosophy of the twentieth century: ‘The illusoriness of the individual self is apparently the central notion of Advaita Vedanta. Every vital tenet of the philosophy—Brahman as the sole reality, the object as false, Māyā as neither real nor unreal, Īśvara as Brahman in reference to Māyā, *mokṣa* (liberation) through knowledge of Brahman and as identity with Brahman—may be regarded as an elaboration of this single notion.’⁴

A Two-level Reality

The most crucial problem in Advaita Vedanta is to explain the coexistence of two entirely different and incompatible entities, Brahman and the world. Brahman is infinite Consciousness, which is *nirguṇa*, absolutely devoid of all attributes. What Brahman is cannot be expressed in words. The Upanishadic definition ‘Brahman is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity’⁵ is only a symbolic indicator, *lakṣana*, not a true description, of the real nature of Brahman. The infinite, the indivisible, the attributeless cannot be characterized in terms of finite categories. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, ‘Brahman is the only thing which has never become *ucchiṣṭa*, that is, defiled by human mouth’. Brahman is the sole Reality. The Upanishads declare: ‘All this is Brahman’; ‘There is no multiplicity here.’⁶

However, the Upanishads and *Brahma Sutra* also regard Brahman as the cause of the universe. All schools of Vedanta hold that Brahman is both the material cause, *upādāna-kāraṇa*, and the efficient cause, *nimitta-kāraṇa*, of the world. The world, which is material in nature, consists of countless living and non-living beings, is ever changing, and is characterized by dualities such as heat and cold, joy and pain; it is, in every way, the opposite of Brahman. How can two totally dissimilar and incompatible entities, Brahman and the world, have any causal relationship at all? If Brahman is the sole reality, how and where can the world exist?

The common answer, based on a superficial understanding of Advaita, is that Brahman alone is real whereas the world is unreal, and the causal relationship between the two is also illusory. This kind of statement is usually nothing more than parroting without any deep thinking. How can we regard as illusory this unimaginably complex world which almost all people perceive to be real? When we actually see an illusion, such as mistaking a rope for a snake, it takes only a little time for us to realize that it is an illusion. Moreover, the snake seen on a rope does not bite, the water seen in a mirage does not slake our thirst. But the world we live in, which gives us innumerable types of joyful and painful experiences, challenges, changes, relationships, endless events, quest for meaning, and so on, cannot be dismissed so easily as illusory.

Shankara’s solution to the problem of the coexistence and cause-and-effect relation between non-dual Brahman and the finite world was to posit a two-level reality. One level is *pāramāṛthika-sattā*, absolute Reality; this is what Brahman is. The other is *vyāvahārika-sattā*, empirical or relative reality; this is what the world is. But then, how can there be two kinds of reality? It is clear that the term ‘reality’ needs proper understanding.

Empirical Level • Whatever is experienced directly through the senses, *pratyakṣa*, is true and real, at least as long as the experience lasts. Our senses have limitations, we may have wrong perceptions, but science and technology enable us to overcome the deceptions of the senses and gain correct knowledge. The acquisition of enormous power by the application of the knowledge gained through the senses itself is the pragmatic proof of the reality of the world. What billions of people have directly experienced for thousands of years cannot be dismissed as unreal. Thus, from the standpoint of direct empirical experience, the world is real.

But the authoritative scriptures known as the Upanishads declare Brahman to be the sole reality. Moreover, great thinkers like Nagarjuna have, through arguments, shown that the world we see is unreal.

This leads to the untenable proposition that the world is both real and unreal, which is self-contradictory. If the world is *sat*, real, it cannot be *asat*, unreal, and vice versa. From this contradiction the Advaitin concludes that the world is different from both *sat* and *asat*; it is *sad-asad-vilakṣaṇa*. Such a fact defies the laws of logical thinking; hence, it is *anirvacanīya*. Another word used in the same sense is *mithyā*. In common parlance *mithyā* means illusion or falsehood, but in Advaita Vedanta it means something 'mysterious'. The terms *mithyā*, *anirvacanīya*, and *sad-asad-vilakṣaṇa* are treated as more or less synonymous; they describe what is known as *vyāvahārika-sattā*. It is Brahman appearing as the world under the influence of its mysterious power known as *māya* or *ajñāna*.

Absolute Level • Brahman remains in its true nature as non-dual, infinite awareness at the higher level of reality known as *pāramārthika-sattā*. It is only at this level that the world appears to be unreal or illusory.

Absolute Reality is also experienced directly. Compared to this experience, the experience of empirical reality may be described as indirect, because it is mediated by the sense organs. The supersensuous experience of absolute Reality is immediate, *aparokṣa*.⁷ This is to be distinguished from *pratyakṣa*, sense-experience. The *aparokṣa* experience, which takes place without the mediation of the senses, is the result of Brahman's self-revelation. Brahman reveals itself because it is self-luminous. Brahman is of the nature of pure Consciousness, which shines in the hearts of all as the Atman. Everything is known through consciousness, but consciousness cannot be known as an object. Consciousness is self-luminous; it reveals itself—it is *svaprakāśa*. The well-known definition of *svaprakāśa* given by the thirteenth-century Advaita writer Cit-sukha says that 'self-revelation is the capability to give rise to immediate self-awareness without its becoming objective knowledge'.⁸

Shankara's theory of two levels of reality, the *pāramārthika* and the *vyāvahārika*, is a distinct and unique feature of Advaita Vedanta. Sri Rama-

krishna has expressed the same idea in his own simple way as *nitya* and *līla*. This two-level theory is often compared to Nagarjuna's theory of two levels of truth: *saṃvṛti satya*, conventional truth, and *paramārtha satya*, absolute truth. There is no doubt that Shankara was influenced by Nagarjuna's dialectic, but the former went far ahead and built a mighty philosophical edifice by integrating Nagarjuna's dialectical approach into *brahma-mīmāṃsā*, the philosophy of Brahman. There are, however, basic differences between the two-level theory of Shankara and that of Nagarjuna. In the first place, Nagarjuna's theory pertains to truth in general, whereas Shankara's theory covers the whole of reality. Secondly, Nagarjuna's approach is mostly negative and is based solely on logic, whereas Shankara's approach is positive and keeps Vedantic scriptures at the forefront. Again, Nagarjuna denies the reality of the world even at the empirical level, whereas Shankara denies the reality of the world only at the level of the Absolute. Lastly, Shankara regards the world as something superimposed on Brahman. This idea of *adhyāsa*, superimposition, is Shankara's original idea which is absent in the philosophy of Nagarjuna or even in Vijnanavada Buddhism.

Unreality of the World • Shankara's main interest was in establishing the sole reality of Brahman, and it was in support of this that he attempted to show the ultimate unreality of the world, which he did mainly by quoting scriptures. But for post-Shankara Advaitins, the unreality of the world and the theory of *ajñāna* became the chief concern because of the need to defend these doctrines against the polemical attacks of rival schools.

The crucial problem facing post-Shankara Advaitins was to establish the unreality of the phenomenal world. Appealing to transcendental experience was of no use as many of the opponents, for example the Naiyayikas, did not believe in it and, moreover, since transcendental experience is subjective, each person may claim his own experience to be the true one. Therefore, the unreality of the world had to be established at the empirical level itself. For

this the first task was to define 'reality'. What is the criterion to distinguish reality from unreality?

Two lines of reasoning are followed by Advaitins to establish the unreality of the phenomenal world. One is to equate impermanence with unreality, and the other to equate objectivity with unconsciousness.

(i) *Anitya* is *asatya*: The ultimate Reality, known as Brahman, is unchanging and eternal. From this it is natural to conclude that whatever is changing must be impermanent, and whatever is impermanent must be unreal—*anitya* is *asatya*. This equation was, however, first worked out by Nagarjuna in the second century. In *Mulamadhyamaka-karika* he states: 'That which did not exist in the beginning and will not exist in the future, how can it be said to exist in the middle?'⁹ Gaudapada, in his *Mandukya Karika*, expresses exactly the same idea.¹⁰

Furthermore, Nagarjuna showed the contradictory nature of all dharmas, all phenomena and experiences. What is contradictory cannot be true. Thus, contradictoriness became a criterion of falsity. From this the Advaitins derived the idea that non-contradictoriness, *abādhitatva*, is the test and criterion of truth or true knowledge.¹¹

Impermanence itself is a form of contradiction. The external world ceases to exist for a person who is in the dream, *svapna*, or deep-sleep, *susupta*, states. The experiences of dream and deep-sleep states contradict the experiences of the waking state. Hence, the external world must be regarded as unreal. Brahman as the inner Self, *pratyagātman*, always abides within us as the unchanging witness, *sākṣin*. It abides even in deep sleep; this is known from the fact that after a deep sleep we are able to recollect, 'I have had a sound sleep; and I did not know anything.' The dream and deep-sleep states do not negate or contradict awareness or consciousness. Consciousness as Atman-Brahman is unchanging, unbroken, ever present; therefore it alone is real, it is the only Reality.

In this connection it should be noted that Advaitins accept even the dream state to be real as long as the experience of the dream lasts. It belongs

to a third kind of reality known as *prātibhāsika-sattā*, illusory existence. The dream becomes unreal only when a person wakes up. Similarly, the world appears to be real until a person awakens to the realization of Brahman.¹²

It should also be pointed out here that the other schools of Vedānta do not accept Shankara's concept of a two-level or three-level reality, nor the unreality of the world. They accept the world as impermanent, no doubt, but for them, impermanence does not mean unreality.

(ii) *Cit* and *jaḍa*: The second line of reasoning that Advaitins follow in order to prove the unreality of the world is based on the antinomic nature of the subject and the object. A major premise of the Advaitins is that consciousness is always the subject; it can never be objectified. It is a fundamental principle that the subject and the object can never be the same. In order to know an object we need consciousness; but to know consciousness nothing is necessary, because consciousness is self-luminous, *svayam-jyoti*, self-revealing. This means, all objects belong to the realm of the unconscious, *jaḍa*.

Chitsukha argues that there can be no relation between the subject, which is pure consciousness, and the object, which is *jaḍa*. In fact, the subject-object relationship is false. However, Chitsukha also shows that the world is false only when the Absolute is realized.¹³

(To be concluded)

Notes and References

1. *Na hi jīvo nāmātyanta-bhinno brahmaṇaḥ ... budhy-ādy-upādhi-kṛtaṁ tu viśeṣam-āśrītya brahmaiva san-jīvaḥ kartā bhoktā cety-ucyate*. Shankaracharya's commentary on *Brahma Sutra*, I.1.31.
2. *Vijñānātma-paramātmānor-avidyā-pratyupasthāpita-nāmarūpa-racita-dehādy-upādhi-nimitto bhedo na pāramārthikaḥ* (1.4.22).
3. In treatises on Vedānta three kinds of *bheda*, difference, are mentioned: (i) *Vijātiya-bheda*: the difference between objects of different kinds or species; as for example the difference between a tree and a cow. The difference between Purusha and Prakriti in Sāṅkhya philosophy is of this kind. The difference between God and the souls in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions is also of

this kind. Just as the potter and the pot can never be the same, so also the Creator and creature can never be the same. This is *not* the type of difference between the individual Self and the Supreme Self accepted in Dvaita schools of Vedanta. (ii) *Sajātiya-bheda*: the difference between objects of the same kind or species; as for instance the differences between two mango trees. The difference between two Purushas in Sankhya philosophy, and the difference between two liberated selves in Ramanuja's philosophy, are of this type. (iii) *Svagata-bheda*: the differences found among the parts of the same object; as for instance the difference among the branches, leaves, and flowers of a mango tree, or the differences between rind, pulp, and seeds of a bel fruit. This is the type of difference between Atman, the individual Self, and Brahman in the dualistic schools of Ramanuja, Madhva, and others. This kind of difference is necessary for the soul to adore and love God and enjoy the bliss of Brahman. But Shankara denies even *svagata-bheda* in Brahman; according to him the individual Self attains oneness with Brahman, so much so that it becomes Bliss itself.

4. Krishnachandra Bhattacharya, 'The Advaita and Its Spiritual Significance', in *The Cultural Heritage*

of India, 7 vols (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2001), 3.245.

5. *Satyam jñānam-anantam brahma*, *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
6. *Sarvam khalvidam brahma*, *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 3.14.1; *Neha nānāsti kiñcana*, *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.19; *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.11.
7. *Yat-sākṣād-āparokṣād-brahma*, *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.4.1–2; also 3.5.1.
8. *Avedyatve sati āparokṣa-vyavahāra-yogyatā*; Chit-sukhacharya, *Tattvapradipika* (Nirnayasagar), 9.
9. *Naivāgram nāvaram yasya tasya madhyam kuto bhavet*; Nagarjuna, *Mulamadhyamaka Karika*, 11.2.
10. Gaudapada, *Mandukya Karika*, 2.5.
11. *Abādhitārtha-viśayaka-jñānam pramā*; see Dharmaraja Adhvarindra, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 4.
12. See Shankaracharya's commentary on *Brahma Sutra*, 2.1.14: '*Sarva-vyavahārānām-eva prāg-brahmātmātā-vijñānāt-satyatvopapattēḥ svapna-vyavahārasyeva prāk-prabodhāt*'; all empirical usages are true before the realization of Brahman as the Self, just as the experiences in the dream state are true before one wakes up.'
13. *Tattvapradipika*, 40–3.

Drg-Dṛśya-Viveka

Vedanta philosophy describes at great length the distinction between the 'Seer' (drg) and the 'seen' (dṛśya), the Subject (viśayī) and the object (viśaya), the 'Ego' (aham) and the 'non-Ego' (idam). The 'Seer' is the perceiver, identical with the Subject and the Ego, and is of the nature of Consciousness and Intelligence. The 'seen' is the thing perceived, identical with the object and the non-Ego, and is insentient by nature. The 'Seer' is all sentiency; therefore the 'Seer' and the 'seen', the Subject and the object, the 'Ego' and the 'non-Ego', are mutually opposed and must never be identified with each other. If one associates the attributes of the Subject with the object, or, vice versa, those of the object with the Subject, one is a victim of an illusory superimposition, the result of one's own ignorance. Yet it is a matter of common experience that in daily practical life people do not distinguish between the Subject and the object, but superimpose the attributes of the one upon the other. Through ignorance they confuse the Subject with the

object. This confusion is observable in every action and thought of our daily life, and is expressed in such common statements as 'This is I' or 'This is mine', whereby we identify the 'I', which is of the nature of Pure Consciousness, with such material objects as the body, the mind, the senses, house, or country. On account of the same confusion we associate the Eternal Self with such characteristics of the body as birth, growth, disease, and death; and this confusion is expressed in such statements as 'I am born', 'I am growing', 'I am ill', or 'I am dying.'

Discrimination between the 'Seer' and the 'seen' is the road leading to the realization of Truth. The 'Seer' is the unchangeable and homogeneous Consciousness, or the knowing principle. It is the perceiver, the Subject, the real 'Ego'. The 'seen' is what is perceived; it is outside the 'Seer' and therefore identical with the object. It is matter, non-Self, and 'non-Ego'. The 'seen' is multiple and changeable.

—Swami Nikhilananda, *Self-Knowledge*, 43–4

Concepts and Approaches



IMAGE: 'EYES DO MORE THAN SEE', LUIS ARGERICH / FLICKR

Looking Deeply at the Elements

Swami Tyagananda

THERE ARE CONFLICTING VIEWS about what philosophy can or cannot do, depending on whom you ask. According to some, philosophy lies at the heart of how we see ourselves and the world around us: it shapes our understanding, harnesses our energies, and influences our actions. According to others, philosophy is hogwash, best expressed in Bertrand Russell's wry words as 'an unusually ingenious attempt to think fallaciously'. Attitudes toward religious philosophies are no different, if not a bit stronger. The utility of religious philosophy to invest the afterlife with meaning may not always be disputed, but there is always the concern whether philosophical abstractions that supposedly deal with matters beyond the reach of the mind have any practical utility in *this* life.

Vedanta has managed to bridge the gap between philosophical rigour and practical utility. This Vedanta could do because it did not remain ossified as a mere philosophy, *darshana*, unconnected with life's daily grind, but developed into a living practice, *sadhana*, that touched and transformed life at every level. The high flights of Vedanta philosophy, powered by reason and intuition, raise our heads above the clouds to provide a peep into the beyond but the demands of Vedanta practice keep our feet firmly planted on the earth, in the here and in the now. After all, the path to 'there' begins from 'here'. The abstractions of Vedanta philosophy, which act as pointers, become tangible in Vedanta practice leading to a direct super-sensual experience of Reality. In so doing, the gap between 'here' and 'there', or between 'now' and 'then', is eliminated.

The abstractions employed to understand the transcendent Reality—generally, and wrongly, understood to be the subject of the afterlife—can also help make *this* life meaningful and fulfilling. A good example to illustrate the truth of this is the Vedantic understanding of the elements, *mahabhutas*, and the practices it inspires.

The elements are the primary building blocks of the material universe. A chapter in the text called *Panchadashi* is titled 'Mahabhuta-viveka; Looking Deeply at the Elements'.¹ When we look carefully at something, we are able to see things in it we may not have noticed before. Looking deeply at the elements will help us see beyond the obvious and gaze directly into their source.

The Elements

What are these elements and where do they come from? The *Taittiriya Upanishad* provides a concise and clear statement: 'From the Atman came space, *akasha*. From space came air, *vayu*. From air came fire, *agni*. From fire came water, *ap*. From water came the earth, *prithivi*.'² When these five elements first emerge one after the other, they are extremely subtle and are called *tanmatra*. They combine with each other to form gross, or more tangible, versions called *mahabhuta*. It is these gross elements that come together in various permutations and combinations, and the result is the material world.

This is, of course, a very different story from the kind of stories offered by secular sciences. It is possible to look at the origin of the world from an entirely material perspective. There are several competing scientific stories, the Big Bang among them, about how the world as we see it today came about. What becomes at once apparent is that perspective matters. The world we see and the meaning

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it carries for us depend on our world view. A purely material perspective strips life of any ultimate meaning and purpose. After all, if everything around us is only the result of a Big Bang, or of whichever scientific theory is being advanced, and if life and consciousness—often used interchangeably in modern discourse—appeared accidentally at some point during evolution, then ethics and morality become social values rather than springboards to spiritual freedom and fulfilment.

A detailed analysis of the respective merits of these different stories is obviously beyond the scope of this article. Nor is it the focus of study here. It is enough to point out that *all* stories are based on certain assumptions and so long as those assumptions are not questioned, these stories are generally reasonable and persuasive. The assumption in the Vedantic story of the emergence of the five primary elements is that their source is pure Consciousness, and this Consciousness is non-dual and non-material.³

To be fair, this assumption is open to question as well. The question, moreover, would have remained unanswered if Vedanta had persisted, like most philosophies, to be intellectually stimulating but not verifiable through direct experience. That did not happen however, since the philosophy of Vedanta has evolved hand in hand with a practice that leads to such an experience, thus confirming its truth and elevating it above mere ‘philosophy’.

It is possible, indeed it seems almost certain, that the *experience* of this non-dual, non-material Consciousness preceded the philosophical structure that arose around it. How did the non-dual entity evolve into a world swamped with duality? Vedanta’s answer is: through the five primary elements. How do we know it happened that way? We don’t. Vedanta holds that we don’t even know whether it happened at all. What we *do* know is that the world we experience now is steeped in duality. Hence, the assumption that its source was non-dual, an assumption that is justifiable because its truth can be verified by anyone through their own experience. As a result of Vedanta practice, if the world is seen

to irrevocably merge into the One, then it stands to reason that it must have come—more accurately, *appeared* to have come—from that One.

From the One to the Many, and the Return to the One

The many emerged from the One, and it has not been a happy experience. The One was divine. The many brought into the picture the human. The experience of human mortality, finitude, and imperfection has produced only pain and suffering and, to make matters worse, these are inseparable from the human condition. The only solution is to reverse the process. The divine somehow seems to have *become* human, and so what is now human must somehow go back to *being* divine. The many must resolve back into the One. This journey back to the Source reclaims that freedom, perfection, immortality, and infinitude that were apparently lost.⁴ In the language of myth, it is returning to the Garden of Eden to be again in the presence of God. In the language of Vedanta, it is examining the ‘many’ to eventually discover it is really the One. It only *feels like* many because we are not looking at it deeply enough.

When the evolution of the material universe is viewed from a spiritual perspective, life acquires meaning and purpose, and the path to freedom and fulfilment becomes clear. When we look deeply at everything around us and see that every material particle is really a combination of the basic elements, and when we never forget that they all derive their being from the Atman, the world changes for us. As the Vedantic text *Drig-drishya-viveka* points out, every entity has five characteristics: it exists, it is cognizable, it is [meaningful and hence] attractive [in its own way], it has a form, and it has a name. Of these, the first three—corresponding to *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda*—belong to Brahman, and the remaining two belong to the world.⁵ The same idea is reiterated in the *Panchadashi*: ‘Brahman’s nature is existence, consciousness, and bliss. The world’s nature is name and form.’⁶

What this means, in effect, is that we are seeing

the One all the time—but the One appears divided because it is covered by name and form. Reminding ourselves often of this fact is helpful. If we do it vigorously and consistently enough, the way we look at ourselves and at the world will change. For one thing, we will begin to respect even the material universe, seeing in it nothing but the Divine covered by name and form. Every element that composes this world will become sacred.

Dr Albert Schweitzer's famous phrase 'reverence for life' comes to mind. It was in the heart of equatorial Africa that he hit upon this expression that summed up his philosophy. This phrase and the ideas that emerged from it have been taught in schools and have provided the foundation and inspiration for the ecological and humanitarian movements of the last century. This is how Dr Schweitzer described the moment when 'reverence for life' became a focal point of his understanding of the world:

For months on end I lived in a continual state of mental agitation. Without the least success I concentrated—even during my daily work at the hospital—on the real nature of the affirmation of life and of ethics and on the question of what they have in common. I was wandering about in a thicket where no path was to be found. I was pushing against an iron door that would not yield. ... All that I had learned from philosophy about ethics left me dangling in midair. ...

While in this mental state I had to take a long journey on the river. ... The only transportation I could find was a small steamer, which was about to leave, towing two overloaded barges. ...

Slowly we crept upstream, laboriously navigating—it was the dry season—between the sandbanks. Lost in thought I sat on the deck of the barge, struggling to find the elementary and universal concept of the ethical that I had not discovered in any philosophy. I covered sheet after sheet with disconnected sentences merely to concentrate on the problem. Two days passed. Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unfore-

seen and unsought, the phrase 'reverence for life'. The iron door had yielded. The path in the thicket had become visible.⁷

Look at the Ocean

One way of practising 'reverence for life' is by taking to heart Swami Vivekananda's teaching: 'Look at the "ocean" and not at the "wave".'⁸ He explains that 'although we appear as little waves, the whole sea is at our back, and we are one with it. No wave can exist of itself' (8.49). Further, he declares: 'This whole universe is my body; all health, all happiness is mine, because all is in the universe. Say, "I am the universe"' (ibid.).

Amidst all the diversity we come across in life, we will see—if we look deeply enough—unity at different levels. Waves are diverse, the ocean is one. Where we look and what we notice is our choice. It is possible to see the diverse objects in the material world as waves, and it is also possible to see the world collectively as one huge ocean of matter. Similarly, every mind in the world is a wave: I can either focus on these waves or see the one huge ocean of subtle matter, the repository of all ideas, thoughts, and emotions.⁹ The same is true of the consciousness apparently defined by and limited to a single body and a single mind, which is really a wave in the infinite ocean of undivided Consciousness, unfettered by any physical or mental limitation.¹⁰


Where does this ocean/wave insight lead us? It tells each one of us that our own physical and mental being is a wave in the cosmic ocean. Everyone else too is a wave in the ocean. Just as each wave differs from every other wave only in name and form, being essentially the same water, our bodies and minds differ only in name and form but are really made from the same elements, which also constitute everything else in the world. The wave is essentially the same as the ocean. The wave freed from its name and form is the ocean. The ocean limited by a name and a form is the wave. The one infinite Being appears as diverse and finite due only to name and form which, in themselves, are unsubstantial.

Keeping this in mind, we can look deeply and remind ourselves that every entity we see or whose presence we feel has in it the five basic elements. Since those elements are also present in my body and mind, taking care of everything around me is the same as taking care of myself. Treating everything with respect and love, having—as Dr Schweitzer would say—‘reverence for life’, is the same as treating myself with respect, love and, yes, reverence. In hurting others, we hurt ourselves. In loving others, we love ourselves. We now begin to understand why hatred for others is really only self-hatred projected outward. What the meditation on the elements gives us ultimately is the ability to transcend these building blocks of the material world and to directly experience the pure Consciousness on which the elements were superimposed, an experience commonly referred to as samadhi. This kind of meditation also finds place in a rite called ‘purification of the elements’, *bhuta-shuddhi*, in Hindu worship, when the elements that make up the subtle body, *sukshma sharira*, are ritually purified. Done at the beginning of one’s daily meditation practice, *bhuta-shuddhi* has a remarkably purifying effect.

The practice of looking deeply at the elements includes a set of affirmations that can transform personal as well as collective life. The affirmations which accompany the objective, *adhibhautika*, and the subjective, *adhyatmika*, meditations may take the form presented on the next page.

Backing up these affirmations with practice helps to bridge the gap between the ‘here’ and the ‘there,’ or between this world and the other world. It makes life one, snapping the arbitrary divisions that create categories such as the sacred and the secular. Life is either sacred or secular, never both. The division between secular and sacred produces a divided life, resulting in stress and alienation.

How we live our life depends on how we view it, which, in turn, depends on how we view ourselves. Our view of ourselves is directly related to the kind of questions we ask. Not for nothing did Swami Vivekananda write: ‘We Vedantists

in every difficulty ought to ask the subjective question, “Why do I see that?” “Why can I not conquer this with love?”’¹¹ It is this kind of subjective questioning that has joined the Vedanta philosophy to an effective time-tested practice which culminates in the experience of freedom, perfection, and fulfilment. 

Notes and References

1. *Viveka* is generally translated as ‘discrimination’. However, since the word carries several connotations, ‘discernment’ might be a better alternative. I find it more convenient to translate *viveka* as ‘looking deeply’, for that is what it really involves. Careful examination is mandatory for clarity of perception and understanding.
2. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.1.1. The translation of the names of the elements is only an approximation here: the element space or the element water should not be confused with the air and the water that we come across in daily life.
3. The qualifier ‘pure’ must be used here with Consciousness to separate it from the common, everyday use of the term in the sense of a consciousness of something. Pure Consciousness indicates consciousness *itself*.
4. The ‘journey’ here is not from one place to another but, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, ‘from lower truth to higher truth’ (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 4.147). In the words of Shankaracharya, it is a progressively deepening awareness of entities which are subtler, *sukshmatara*, greater, *mahattara*, and more inward, *pratyagatmabhuta*. See his commentary on the *Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.10–11.
5. See *Drig-drishya-viveka*, 20.
6. *Panchadashi*, 13.62.
7. Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998), 154–5.
8. *Complete Works*, 7.7.
9. According to Vedanta, the mind is also a product of matter. While the body is composed of gross matter, the mind is composed of subtle matter.
10. For a longer discussion on the ocean/wave analogy and its implications, see ‘Look at the Ocean: A Vedantic View of Health’ in *Healthy Mind, Healthy Body* (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 1997).
11. *Complete Works*, 8.383.



Objective Affirmations

Looking deeply at the world and seeing in it the presence of the first element, space, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I must avoid overcrowding.' This applies to both physical space and mental space. When I respect space, it fills me with peace and harmony.

Looking deeply at the world and seeing in it the presence of the second element, air, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I must keep the air clean.' When the air is clean outside, the air will be clean inside, because it is the same air that I breathe. When I respect air, it fills me with health and harmony.

Looking deeply at the world and seeing in it the presence of the third element, fire, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I must conserve energy.' My life depends on energy resources; if I use the world's energy resources responsibly, not only will it make my own life happier but also those of my children and grandchildren. When I respect light, it fills me with hope and harmony.

Looking deeply at the world and seeing in it the presence of the fourth element, water, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I must keep the water clean.' When the drinking water is clean and abundant, it sustains life and promotes health, my own as well as of others. When I respect water, it fills me with life and harmony.

Looking deeply at the world and seeing in it the presence of the fifth element, earth, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I must take care of the soil.' When the soil is cared for, it produces plenty of healthy food. Food is precious and thousands of lives can be saved if enough food is grown and wastage prevented. When I respect earth, it fills me with contentment and harmony.

Subjective Affirmations

Looking deeply at my body and mind, and seeing in them the presence of the first element, space, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I feel free.' Nothing can bind or set limits on space. When I respect space, it fills me with the idea of freedom.

Looking deeply at my body and mind, and seeing in them the presence of the second element, air, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I am one with life.' Air is a visible manifestation of Prana, which sustains all life. When I respect air, it fills me with gratitude that I am alive.

Looking deeply at my body and mind, and seeing in them the presence of the third element, fire, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I am one with consciousness.' Without consciousness, even light cannot be seen. When I respect light, it fills me with the light of consciousness.

Looking deeply at my body and mind, and seeing in them the presence of the fourth element, water, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I feel clear.' Water stands for clarity. When I respect water, it fills me with clarity of mind and clarity of purpose.

Looking deeply at my body and mind, and seeing in them the presence of the fifth element, earth, I realize its sanctity and make the affirmation: 'I feel solid.' Earth reminds me of solidity and firmness. When I respect earth, it fills me with strength.

You Are That

Swami Nityasthananda



IF A PERSON LOSES CONTACT with one's previous experiences, loses one's memory completely, then one cannot recognize oneself, and consequently forfeits self-identity. Forgetting someone else or something else is quite natural, but forgetting oneself is a great tragedy. If one forgets oneself, one cannot relate with anyone or anything, and is thus reduced to being an inert object or a mere machine. Though a machine may work wonderfully, it cannot have a self-identity, and one cannot have a meaningful and conscious relationship with it.

In fact, we all enter into this state of total self-forgetfulness every day, a state in which we become other than what we think we are, in which we lose our self-identity. In this state the master is no more a master, the servant no more a servant, the father no more a father, and the son no more a son. In

this realm there are no relationships to build and none to care for, therein exists no friend or foe. This state is called *susupti*, deep sleep, in Sanskrit, about which the Upanishads speak thus:

Atra pitā'pitā bhavati mātā'mātā lokā alokāḥ devā adevāḥ vedā avedāḥ. Atra steno'steno bhavati bhrūṇahā'bhrūṇahā cāṇḍālo'cāṇḍālah paulkaso'paulkasaḥ śramaṇo'sramaṇaḥ tāpaso'tāpasaḥ; ananvāgataṁ punyena ananvāgataṁ pāpena tīrṇo hi tadāsarvañchokān hṛdayasya bhavati.

In this state a father is no father, a mother no mother, worlds no worlds, the gods no gods, the Vedas no Vedas. In this state a thief is no thief, the killer of a noble brahmana is no killer, a chandala no chandala, a Pulkasa no Pulkasa, a monk no monk, a hermit no hermit. (This form of his) is untouched by good work and untouched by evil work, for he is then beyond all the woes of his heart (intellect).¹

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The Dream of Waking Sleep

Time wakes us up, and we start our daily chores as a father or a mother, a president or a thief, a pauper or a billionaire, as the case may be. We awaken to the world of space, time, and causation, the world of sense-bound empirical existence, which is generally considered to be our waking state. However, there is a world even beyond this, entering into which one becomes truly awakened. This is the spiritual world, compared to which the so-called waking state appears to be sleep—‘waking sleep’ as P D Ouspensky called it. It is not very difficult to understand this when we look at ourselves with a candid vision and see how we are drowned in the current of events and thoughts, being seldom actually aware of ourselves. Compared to this, the spiritual state is the truly awakened one. Who will awaken us to this spiritual state? What will happen to us in that realm? In deep sleep we are nothing, in the empirical world we become something, and in the spiritual world we become everything. ‘*Tat-tvam-asi*; you are That’ is a great utterance of the Upanishads that awakens us to this spiritual world in which we become everything.

This famous statement appears in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*: ‘*Sa ya eṣo’ṇimaitad-ātmyam-idam sarvaṁ tat-satyam sa ātmā tat-tvam-asi śvetaketu*; that subtle Being is in and through everything in this universe. That is the Truth, that is the Self, and O Shvetaketu, you are That.’² This statement occurs nine times in that context, emphasizing that there is no distinction between universal and individual existence. Commenting on the statement ‘you are That’, Shankaracharya says: ‘The purpose of this statement is to remove the sense of false individuality due to association with the false products of Prakriti, such as the body.’³

Filling the Infinite Void

This individuality is the root cause of all evils. When the individual is connected with the whole, it draws sustenance and derives its meaning from the whole. Because of estrangement from the whole caused by ignorance, it tries to derive meaning and sustain it-

self through association with the body, mind, and senses, and also with the things related to them. But this is a vain effort, for the infinite cannot be satisfied with the finite. We try to fill the inner vacuum, caused by this meaninglessness, by indulging in an orgy of material possessions, of power and position, and this even at the cost of human relationships. Good and meaningful human relationships require an association with the Spirit and some sort of transcendence of materiality. However, because of the enormous development of technology and the invasion of commercialism and consumerism humans are totally cut off from their spiritual roots. As a result, they are unable to relate themselves meaningfully to other human beings, this requiring at least some amount of the true love, sympathy, and other positive values that can come only from the Spirit and not from matter.

If we consider human beings as consisting only of body, mind, and senses, they are nothing more than highly sophisticated machines, marvellous products of Prakriti. But certain characteristics distinguish humans from even powerful machines. These characteristics can be categorized as follows: i) ethical sense, moral conscience; ii) sense of fulfilment; iii) self-awareness, ‘I’-consciousness; and iv) sense of bondage and desire to be free.

Since we cannot attribute these characteristics to machines or other material objects, they are clear indices of some non-material element in humans, that which we call the Spirit, Self, or divine Consciousness. In short, we cannot conceive that any machine or material object could possess any sort of personality.

Nothing Exists Alone

We have to identify ourselves with this spiritual Consciousness. A question arises then: Is this Consciousness individual or universal? Actually, in the last analysis, there is nothing individual in this world. Even physically, there is no individuality; we are all small whirlpools in the ocean of matter, as Swami Vivekananda says. According to quantum physics, ‘The subatomic particles have no

meaning as isolated entities but can be understood only as interconnections, or correlations, among various processes of observation and measurement. In other words, subatomic particles are not ‘things’, but interconnections among things, and these in turn are interconnections among other things, and so on. In quantum theory we never end up with any ‘things’; we always deal with interconnections.’⁴

Not only is the whole world a web of interconnections, in which we cannot zero in on any discrete object, but every object contains the other, as the seed contains the tree. It is impossible to conceive of any one thing being independent of another: ‘At first, we may see the compost and flowers as opposite, but when we look deeply, we see that the flowers already exist in the compost, and the compost already exists in the flowers.’⁵ This being the case, even physical individuality is only apparently real, melting away under the heat of incandescent reasoning: ‘Swami Vivekananda proved conclusively that all our neighbors across the water, even the remotest, are our cousins, differing only a trifle in color, language, customs and religion.’⁶

To our limited vision it appears that we are physically separate from the things and people around us. But strictly speaking it is not possible to fix a boundary line between our physical body and our physical environment. By observation under appropriate magnification it can be demonstrated that a physical body is inseparably interwoven with its external environment—the whole of the physical universe is a continuous mass of matter. The so-called three-dimensional space is only pragmatically real. Only if things are spatially separate do concepts like length, breadth, height, and distance become meaningful. When there is no separation, the object measured, the measuring instrument, and the one who measures become one. Therefore, to persons who think that they have a separate individuality, at least physically, the Upanishad says: ‘You are That’; you are that same physical universe; you have no separate existence of your own.

Love Your Neighbour to Love Yourself

This understanding of physical oneness can help us expunge all kinds of discrimination—such as those based on caste, religion, and nationality—and inspire us to ‘turn as one man to build the earth’. Another important value we derive from this axiomatic fact is that if we help others, we help ourselves, because the world around us is only an extension of our personality. And as a corollary, if we harm others, we harm ourselves. Our health and well-being depend upon the surrounding environment. ‘The individual’s life is in the life of the whole, the individual’s happiness is the happiness of the whole,’ as Swami Vivekananda says (4.463). The poisoning of any particular part of a lake poisons the whole lake. Similarly, any impairment of society is detrimental to our own good.

Probably, the Upanishads too espouse the idea of wholeness when they assert that happiness comes only from the infinite, not from little limited things: *Nālpe sukhamasti bhūmaiva sukham*.⁷ This sense of wholeness makes the mind free from numerous mental blockades; happiness then ensues from within. It seems this sense of wholeness is not only innate in humans, it is a basic need for meaningful existence. It prompts us to relate with fellow humans, with various organizations, with society as a whole, and ultimately with the infinite, with God.

David Bohm says:

Man has always been seeking wholeness—mental, physical, social, individual. It is instructive to consider that the word ‘health’ in English is based on an Anglo-Saxon word ‘hale’ meaning ‘whole’: that is, to be healthy is to be whole. ... Likewise, the English ‘holy’ is based on the same root as ‘whole’. All of this indicates that man has sensed always that wholeness or integrity is an absolute necessity to make life worth living. Yet, over the ages, he has generally lived in fragmentation.⁸

There is a story of a good farmer who used to receive the ‘best seed’ award every year. Strangely, he had the habit of sharing his best seeds with the neighbouring farmers. When he was asked about

this strange behaviour, he used to say: 'I am doing so in my own self-interest. If I give them the seeds of inferior quality for cultivation, the quality of my own seeds would subsequently suffer due to cross-pollination. That is why I give them the best seeds.' This idea of oneness must stir up a deep sense of social responsibility in us, and we must regulate our life accordingly, remembering the famous statement of Epictetus: 'One cannot pursue one's own highest good without at the same time necessarily promoting the good of others.'⁹

'The Sea of Common Thought'

Mentally also we do not have any separate existence, since our minds are inseparable parts of the cosmic mind. As Mikhail Naimy puts it: 'Nor are your thoughts the thoughts of you alone. The sea of common thought does claim them as her own; and so do all the thinking beings who share that sea with you.'¹⁰ This being so, thought transmission does take place; influence upon others and the reading of their minds is rendered possible. Thoughts are not confined to the citadel of our own personality; they are extended all around us as waves of energy, exerting their influence on others. If our thought vibrations are good, we get exposed to good thought waves outside; same is the case with bad vibrations. Swami Vivekananda says:

When I am doing a certain action my mind may be said to be in a certain state of vibration; all minds which are in similar circumstances will have the tendency to be affected by my mind. If there are different musical instruments tuned alike in one room, all of you may have noticed that when one is struck, the others have tendency to vibrate so as to give the same note. So all minds that have the same tension, so to say, will be equally affected by the same thought.¹¹

We must, therefore, be very careful about our thoughts. Our strongly unwholesome thoughts may get galvanized by similar thought waves outside. By thinking badly we not only harm ourselves but also poison the outer surroundings, which will in turn

further our own degeneration. This understanding of the universality of mind must quicken us to take care of our thoughts with greater seriousness and sense of responsibility. It is possible for people who constantly think positive thoughts, and avoid negative ones, to create a convivial atmosphere in a home or institution, whereas those with a disdainful nature achieve just the opposite. This is the practical dimension of the statement 'you are That' with reference to the mental aspect of our lives.

Music of the Soul

A new hypothesis of 'morphic fields,' propounded by the biologist Rupert Sheldrake, claims to account for the wholeness and integrity of both the physical and the mental universe. According to this theory,

Morphic fields organize atoms, molecules, crystals, organelles, cells, tissues, organs, organisms, societies, ecosystems, planetary systems, solar systems, galaxies. In other words, they organize systems at all levels of complexity, and are the basis for the wholeness that we observe in nature, which is more than the sum of the parts. ... In the realm of developmental biology the morphic fields that shape the growing organisms are called morphogenetic fields; in social organization they can be called social fields; and [in] the organization of mental activity they can be called mental fields. But all these kinds of fields are particular kinds of morphic fields, and all are shaped and stabilized by morphic resonance.¹²

According to Vedanta, there is a higher level of wholeness and integration related to the divine Consciousness, which is both the immanent and transcendental reality of the whole universe. In its immanent aspect it is all-pervading, manifesting itself as different forms, energies, and as morphic fields also. In its transcendental aspect it is beyond all. Being identified with this Reality, and remaining firmly rooted in its transcendental aspect, one can deal with every part of this universe without being ensnared by it; one can remain in the world as a lotus leaf in water, *padma-patram-ivāmbhasā*. Swami Yatiswarananda says:

With the help of prayer or hymns, by repeating mystic words and dwelling on their meaning, by meditating on the divine Reality, we can create such a ‘music’ in our soul, such a harmonious state within us, that we rise above our little personality, our little ego, our individual consciousness. Then we feel the touch of the true Super-ego, the cosmic Consciousness that lies in us all. It is in this state that the cosmic Spirit is realized to be more real than the individual consciousness. Here the deepest integration takes place. When the soul comes back to normal consciousness, to the plane of the ego, the mind and the body, it feels a remarkable integration. Then the individual consciousness remains rooted in the Universal, and the spiritualized ego remains in tune with the mind and the body which act as its most obedient servants.¹³

The Spirit behind the Mask

The real purport of the Upanishadic statement ‘you are That’, as we all know, is spiritual integration through the identification of the individual self with the universal Self. One should not confine oneself only to the physical and mental levels. The oneness at these lower levels, however justifiable it is, is only materialistic, for even the mind is a product of matter, according to Vedanta. Awareness belongs to the realm of consciousness; even the awareness of physical and mental oneness is essentially spiritual, as matter cannot be aware of its own oneness. If it is aware, it ceases to be matter. To the extent that we identify ourselves with the Spirit within, we become more and more aware of physical and mental oneness, and this enables us to empathize better with others. We then reach the state of one ‘who judges of pleasure or pain everywhere by the same standard as one applies to oneself’.¹⁴ After realizing this same spiritual principle behind both the object and the subject, one will see everything throbbing with Spirit. Gaudapada says:

*Tattvam-ādhyātmikam dṛṣtvā
tattvam dṛṣtvā tu bāhyataḥ;
Tattvibhūtas-tadārāmas-
tattvād-apracyuto bhavet.*

After knowing that the spirit resides both within and without, and being one with that Spirit, and finding joy only in that Spirit, one will not swerve from that Spirit.¹⁵

The word ‘That’ in the statement ‘you are That’ points to Ishvara, the Supreme Being behind the universe, and the word ‘you’ refers to jiva, the individual soul. Since it is illogical to say that this limited jiva is identical with Ishvara, we have to resort to *lakṣaṇārtha*, the indirect meaning of the statement. Identity here refers to the Spirit behind both ‘That’ and ‘you’, which remains after such characteristics as lordship and creation on the one hand and the body and mind on the other are stripped off the denotations of the two terms. We can illustrate this with an example of an actor, Devadatta by name, who acts in different roles—Rama, Krishna, and the like—in different plays. When all the make-up pertaining to different roles is removed, the same actor remains as his natural self. For one who is not acquainted with the actor, Rama and Krishna are certainly different personalities. But one who knows the actor well exclaims: ‘*So’yaṁ devadattaḥ*; he is the same Devadatta.’ He sees the different roles as well as the one person who plays them.

Abandon All Boundaries


There is one common substratum of water behind all waves; similarly there is one spiritual principle, a background reality, behind all names and forms. These names and forms as a rule bespeak a plurality which cannot be attributed to the consciousness behind them. If there is a plurality of consciousnesses, we have to assume one more consciousness to perceive it, and this is untenable.

In the words of David Bohm:

It will be ultimately misleading and indeed wrong to suppose, for example, that each human being is an independent actuality who interacts with other human beings and with nature. Rather, all these are projections of a single totality. As a human being takes part in the process of this totality, he is fundamentally changed in the very activity in

which his aim is to change that reality which is the content of his consciousness. To fail to take this into account must inevitably lead one to serious and sustained confusion in all that one does.¹⁶

Therefore, the universe is one on all the three levels—physical, mental, and spiritual—and disparateness is only an illusion. This idea of disparateness is the root of all confusions, conflicts, wars, and bloodshed as well as a great stumbling block to affable human relationships. Ken Wilber says: ‘The simple fact is that we live in a world of conflict and opposites because we live in world of boundaries. Since every boundary line is also a battle line, here is the human predicament: the firmer one’s boundaries, the more entrenched are one’s battles.’¹⁷

The idea of oneness—identification of object and subject—expressed in this Upanishadic dictum ‘you are That’ must impel us to develop a universal outlook in the present context of globalization, eschewing all the parochial attitudes which impede the progressive march of civilization. 

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Awakening to Oneself

The Upanishads in fact do not consist primarily of revealed truths which can be transmitted through the medium of concepts and words, even if one has to admit that all passing on of experience has to be done, at least in the early stages, in this way. The Upanishadic seer is much less the man who ‘knows this or that’, than the man who ‘knows thus (*evam*)’, as the Upanishads constantly reiterate, calling him *evamvid*. It is like a new way of knowing, a new way of looking at things, at the world, a new illumination which makes one perceive everything quite differently. It is essentially a matter of passing on an experience of oneself, which does not convey any new information, so to speak, but which is much more an awakening to an unsuspected depth in oneself, an awakening to oneself, to things, to the

mystery which, when projected, is called God. It is an experience, a discovery which according to Indian tradition goes back to the awakening and enlightenment of the early rishis who lived in the forests, on the banks of the Indus, and at the foot of the Himalayas. He alone can pass on this experience who has known it himself, who has been awakened within, the *evamvid*, he who knows thus. Words can be passed on by anyone who has a good enough memory to repeat what he has read or heard. Ideas also can be conceived and communicated by anyone with a sufficiently clear mind. But an experience quite literally cannot be transmitted. Rather, it simply propagates itself.

—Swami Abhishiktananda,
The Upanishads, 61

Falsity: the Advaitic Perspective

Swami Tattwavidananda

ONCE HARINATH, who later became Swami Turiyananda, failed to visit his master Sri Ramakrishna for many days. This intrigued Sri Ramakrishna. On enquiry, he learnt that Harinath was deeply engrossed in studying Vedanta philosophy and so had little time to visit Dakshineswar. Probably, Harinath was absorbed in the Reality that Vedanta teaches and the logical and critical analysis of falsity of the universe that it proposes. At long last, when Harinath did visit Dakshineswar once again, Sri Ramakrishna gently reproached him by asking if Vedanta taught anything other than what is given by the dictum 'Brahman alone is real, the universe is false'. The huge edifice of the non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy stands strong on this singular assertion. Sri Ramakrishna's reiteration of and his seal of approval on this time-tested concept of Vedanta assume great significance as he is widely regarded as an incarnation of the Supreme Being. He exhorts us not only to accept the Vedantic view but also to experience it in our lives. This probably is the reason why Harinath's long absence drew his reproach.

Harinath had a close association with his guru Sri Ramakrishna, and that gave impetus to his spiritual disciplines for experiencing the Vedantic truth in life while renouncing everything but Brahman as false. It is experience alone that matters in spiritual life. Acharya Shankara has this to say in this context: '*Anubhava-avasānatvād-bhūta-vastu-viśayatvācca brahma-jñānasya*; the knowledge of Brahman culminates in experience, and it relates to an existing entity.'¹ His observation on a mantra of the *Mundaka Upanishad* is also worth mentioning. The text of

the Upanishad reads: '*Tad-vijñānārthan sa gurum-evābhigacchet*; for knowing that (Brahman), he (the aspirant) must approach a guru.'² Acharya Shankara comments: '*Śāstrajñō'pi svātantryeṇa brahma-jñānānveṣaṇam na kuryāt*; though well-versed in the scriptures, one should not seek the knowledge of Brahman (undertake spiritual practices) on one's own.' In reproaching Harinath, Sri Ramakrishna may have been pointing to this truth.

The path of *vicāra*, enquiry, which complements study of the scriptures, especially the Upanishads, is greatly emphasized in Advaita Vedanta. Experiential knowledge of the non-dual Reality can dawn from a discriminative analysis of such Upanishadic dicta as '*Tat-tvam-asi*; you are That'. *Vicāra* is recommended for one who has the fourfold spiritual treasure of discernment, renunciation, control of the mind and senses, and the desire for liberation. Sri Ramakrishna encouraged reasoning. He advised his devotees time and again to practise discernment, though generally he recommended the path of devotion.

The *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* says: '*Śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyah*; (the Self) is to be heard of, reasoned about, and meditated upon.'³ The *Chhandogya Upanishad* states: '*Paṇḍito medhāvī gāndhārān-evopasampadyetaivam-evehācāryavān-puruṣo veda*; (just as) the well-informed and intelligent person reaches the country of the Gandharas, similarly, in this world, a person who has a teacher attains knowledge.'⁴ Acharya Shankara says in his commentary that the word *medhāvī* in the mantra suggests that the person concerned is intelligent, 'able to understand the path'.

From the above discussion one may gather that both falsity of the universe and reality of Brahman are amenable to logical analysis; here, of course, we shall be dealing with falsity of the universe alone.

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The Material of the Universe

It is commonly accepted that the universe we live in is a created entity. However, we need to know the nature of this creation. Every creation needs a material cause. Material causes are threefold—initiating, transforming, and uninvolved. The view of the initiating material cause is upheld by the Nyaya-Vaisheshika system of Indian philosophy, while the notion of the transforming cause is held by Sankhya, and that of the uninvolved cause by Advaita Vedanta.

Take, for example, a piece of cloth formed by weaving together a bunch of threads. The threads remain in their original form in the cloth without undergoing any change. Here the cloth is something new, though it consists of nothing but threads, which form the material cause of the cloth. This view of fresh origination, *ārambhavāda*, is held by the Naiyayikas and Vaisheshikas. One may argue that these threads could produce a second piece of cloth after having formed the first piece, because they remain essentially as threads even after the cloth is produced. The Naiyayikas would say that this cannot happen because, with the production of the first piece of cloth, the prior-absence, *prāgabdhāva*, of the cloth is lost. That is, the piece of cloth already exists now and cannot be produced anew. Prior-absence, according to Nyaya-Vaisheshika, is one of the causes that produce any effect. And with its destruction, after the first piece of cloth is produced, there can be no further production of effect out of the same cause, which here is the prior-absence.

The Sankhyas, on the other hand, hold that the material cause no longer remains in its original state. It gets transformed into an effect. In the piece of cloth therefore, threads are no longer threads; they have *become* a piece of cloth. Therefore, there can be no further production of another piece of cloth. The ‘absence of something’ is a negative entity; it cannot give rise to anything positive, as that would be a contradiction in terms. Here the question of *prāgabdhāva*, prior-absence, giving rise to an effect does not arise at all. This view regarding cause and effect is known as *pariṇāmavāda*, the theory of real transformation.

The Nihilists or Shunyavadins among the Bud-

dhist hold that it is only after the complete destruction of a cause that the effect can be seen. None can hope to see the seed below the earth once the plant has grown. This view is known as *asatkāryavāda*, theory of origination from a cause that no longer exists.

The Advaita Vedantins are against all these views and contend that what is said to be produced, is in fact *mithyā*, false. In other words, it has no independent existence. A piece of cloth is nothing but threads woven together. Therefore, strictly speaking, a cloth is no cloth. While calling it a cloth we ignore what it is made of, the essence of it. We pay attention to the appearance and not the underlying essence. To clarify this point the Advaita Vedantins give the well-known example of the snake-rope illusion. We may mistake a piece of rope for a snake and be frightened for the time being. But ultimately we find out that it is no snake and there is nothing to worry about. However, this apparent manifestation is caused by the underlying reality and our ignorance of it. Such is the power of ignorance, asserts the Advaitin, that it obscures what is true and creates something in its wake which is non-existent or false. The Advaita Vedantins are unique in their assertion that an effect or appearance is essentially false and, therefore, its cause is also false. Extending this argument further, they try to prove that the whole universe as perceived by us is established on Brahman, the ultimate Reality, and that Brahman cannot be termed ‘a cause’ and hence is free from any qualifying features or attributes.

Falsity is a vexed question in Advaita Vedanta. A large portion of the higher Vedanta literature deals with it. It is a standard practice in philosophy to support by a precise definition and some suitable evidence any claim made in favour of something. To many, falsity of this universe is a vague idea because negating the world—the place where we live, move, and have our being—is a tricky proposition. Therefore, a thorough understanding of falsity from the non-dualistic perspective is absolutely necessary, as other systems of thought bear no allegiance to such a view.

Advaitic Definitions of Falsity

The problem of falsity has been philosophically treated at great length by post-Shankara Advaitins—Chitsukhacharya, Prakashatman Muni, Madhusudana Saraswati, and Anandabodhacharya, to name a few. In his monumental work *Tattvapradipika*, Chitsukhacharya gives ten definitions of falsity. However, playing the role of an opponent himself, he points out flaws in these definitions and finally settles for a definition entirely free from error. One may ask: What is the need of coining definitions and rejecting them later, rather than giving a correct definition right away? The sole purpose of doing so is to strengthen one's own view by removing all possible doubt about its correct understanding.

Let us refer to a few definitions provided by Chitsukhacharya. The first definition says: '*Mithyātvam pramāṇāgamyatvam*; falsity is that which is not an object of proof.'⁵ No valid means of knowledge can reveal a false entity. Take the example of the false superimposition of a snake on a piece of rope. Well-known means of knowledge—perception and the like—cannot be responsible for the knowledge of the illusory snake. The snake, though seen, is not an object of perception in the way a flower is. The process of perception involved in knowing a flower is not fully operational in perceiving an illusory snake. According to Advaita Vedantins, a flower has a phenomenal reality; it can exist beyond our knowledge, whereas an illusory snake cannot exist without our knowledge, much like happiness and misery. We may remember them but cannot claim that they lie elsewhere when we do not feel them. The Sanskrit word for such an illusory object is *prātibhāsika*—that which lasts as long as it appears to a particular person. A flower could be known to many at a given time, whereas a piece of rope would be mistaken for a snake only by the particular person for whom the factors of illusion are working. These factors would include resemblance between snake and rope, fear of and aversion to snakes in the person concerned, and lack of visibility. Therefore, it is commonly ob-

served that the same piece of rope that had terrified a person by giving the impression of a snake, fails to affect another in any way.

We thus see that *pratyakṣa*, perception, alone is of no avail in knowing a false object. And, when perception fails, other proofs such as *anumāna*, inference, *upamāna*, comparison, and *anupalabdhi*, non-apprehension—all of which are based on perception—cannot fare any better. Therefore, the claim that falsity is not amenable to any epistemological proof seems to hold good. However, a closer analysis reveals that the definition in question is beset with the defect called *ativyāpti*, over-coverage. If a definition covers more than what it is intended for, then it is said to have the defect of *ativyāpti*. Such a definition fails to describe its object in a unique manner. The definition of falsity quoted above, while successfully describing such illusory objects as a snake superimposed on a rope, also includes Brahman, the ultimate Reality. This is because non-dualistic Vedanta asserts, on the basis of Shruti texts and the personal experience of rishis, that Brahman is *svapprakāśa*, self-revelatory. And that which is self-revealed does not require further means for being cognized or revealed. Consequently, the first definition of falsity put forward by Chitsukhacharya has to be rejected for including within its ambit Brahman, which is Existence Absolute and is in no way associated with falsity.

Here is another definition of falsity furnished by Chitsukhacharya: '*Sad-asad-vilakṣaṇatvam*; being neither real nor unreal' (33). The illusory snake is not real because it appears only temporarily. Before appearing to the person concerned it had no existence. It will vanish when the rope upon which it appears comes to sight. If that snake were real, it would not have vanished. That which stands the test of time is truly real. For being real, the entity has to exist and reveal itself in all three phases of time—past, present, and future. The illusory snake does not so exist. However, it is also not 'unreal'. The unreal is a non-entity—a hare's horn, for instance. 'Hare's horn', 'barren woman's son', 'sky flowers', and so on are mere words, not objects of

cognition. They do not correspond to any actual object that one can make use of or which can affect or impress us. The illusory snake cannot be called unreal because it does 'appear', becomes an object of cognition—though false cognition—and can affect a person. The definition of falsity, therefore, applies to an illusory snake because it is neither real nor unreal.

An opponent could, however, question such a proposition on the plea that if something is not real it must be unreal, and if it is not unreal, then it must be real. There can be no third category different from these two. Reality and unreality are mutually exclusive. The illusory snake must either be real or unreal. That it is neither real nor unreal sounds contradictory. Such an object would be beyond human understanding and cognition. Hence, this definition of falsity is also to be rejected.

The Advaitins, however, accept this definition of falsity and dismiss the charges levelled against them by furnishing an inferential proof. We shall not discuss this proof—which is a bit abstruse for our needs here—but shall take a simpler example instead: Colour and taste are two attributes absent in air. Similarly, reality and unreality are two features whose absence is present in a false object, namely, an illusory snake. Therefore, the opponent's objection that such an object does not exist is untenable.

With respect to the meaning of the words 'real' and 'unreal', the Advaitins and their opponents hold opposite views. According to the followers of the dualistic school of Madhvacharya,

that which is sublated is 'unreal' and that which can never be contradicted is 'real'. Thus, the illusory snake, the silver that is mistakenly seen in mother of pearl, and a hare's horn are unreal, whereas both Brahman and the phenomenal world are real since none can go beyond them. Thus, according to the Madhvas, both Brahman and the universe belong to the same order of reality. Similarly, both illusory silver and hare's horn belong to the same category, the unreal, because they are sublated. Unreality and reality are, therefore, opposite to each other. As against this view, Advaitins hold that not being sublated 'in any possible way' is what is connoted by the word 'real'. And never becoming an object of cognition in the form of 'is', even mistakenly, is what is denoted by the word 'unreal'. A hare's horn is never cognized by anyone, whereas an illusory snake is very often wrongly cognized under the spell of ignorance. Thus, a hare's horn and an il-

lusory snake cannot belong to the same category.

From this it follows that an illusory snake is different from what is unreal, and since it is sublated by the true knowledge of the rope underlying the snake, an illusory snake is also not real.

On the basis of the above discussion, we may safely conclude that reality and unreality are not opposed to each other.

Being sublated is not tantamount to being unreal. An illusory snake is not unreal though it disappears when the underlying rope is cognized. The phenomenal world too, is not unreal,

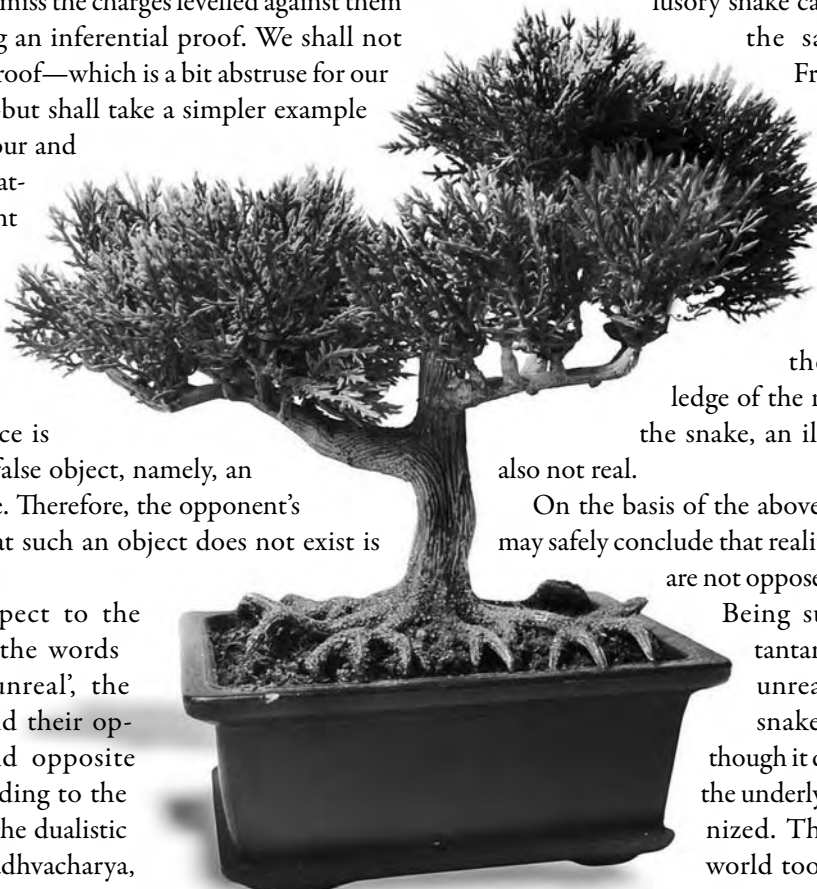


IMAGE: 'BONSAI', JUSTIN MCCOLLUM / FLICKR

though it gets sublated by the knowledge of Brahman, the underlying Reality. Thus, 'not becoming the locus of reality and unreality' is a flawless definition of falsity that also unerringly points to the ephemeral nature of the universe. This definition of falsity is announced by Padmapadacharya, one of the four chosen disciples of Acharya Shankara, in his *Panchapadika*, an exposition of Acharya Shankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*.⁶

There are many other definitions of falsity. Madhusudana Saraswati in his *Advaita Siddhi* tells us that out of those definitions only five are free from error, and a popular verse supports this view.⁷ According to the verse, the first definition is that given in the *Panchapadika* by Padmapadacharya. The second and third are definitions given by Prakashatman Muni in his *Panchapadika Vivarana*. The fourth is by Chitsukhacharya and the last by Anandabodhacharya. Chitsukhacharya gives his conclusive definition in verse form.⁸ It may be summarized thus: 'The falsity of any positive object lies in its absence in the locus where its presence is posited.' For this too, we could cite the old example of the rope-snake illusion. A snake is a distinct positive entity which can never have a presence in the rope where it is wrongly cognized.

Here it is to be kept in mind that by defining falsity in the above manner the Advaitins are interested in proving the falsity of all that is said to have been produced out of a material cause. They can

prove the falsity of this universe to the extent they succeed in this respect.

Reality, Unreality, or Neither

In this context the Advaitin is confronted with the following question: Can a piece of cloth be said to 'exist' in the threads that go in its making. In other words, is a piece of cloth different from the threads, its material cause? Or, are they identical? In the first place, the threads and cloth are not totally different. Had they been different, one could not have traced the threads in the cloth. Again, if they were identical, there could not possibly be any relation between them. Water and H₂O are identical, and it is pointless to examine whether or not they have any interrelation. If they were identical, threads could serve the purpose of a cloth. But, that does not happen. Further, there cannot be both difference and non-difference between them, as that would be self-contradictory. Therefore, cause and effect are neither different nor non-different. This is what is technically called 'falsity of the effect'.

Here we are also reminded of the famous statement occurring in the sixth chapter of the *Chhandogya Upanishad*: '*Ekena mr̥tṇṇḍena sarvaṁ mṛnmayaṁ vijñātaṁ syād-vācārambhaṇaṁ vikāro nāmadheyam mṛttiketyeva satyam*'; in knowing a lump of clay all things made of clay become known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is clay.'⁹ Thus, what is produced must only be a variation of the material cause, bearing a different name—a piece of cloth is nothing but a collection of threads. 'Cloth' is merely a name and does not have an existence separate from that of the threads constituting it.

The Advaitins try to prove this point with the help of a formal inference: A *paṭa*, piece of cloth, contains absolute absence of everything, even the absence of the cloth itself, in the threads that make it. The *hetu*, reason, for such an absence is its nature of being a cloth—*paṭatva*, cloth-ness. This is supported by the example of another piece of cloth. A *dṛṣṭānta*, example, holds both the *hetu* and *sādhya*, predicate, together in itself. Here, another

What is non-real is not necessarily useless and what is useful need not be real. This is a fundamental tenet of Advaita. Therefore the fact that the realm of duality is non-real does not take away from its efficient character. The designation 'vyāvahārika' is itself a recognition of the efficient character of the realm of duality. The vyāvahārika is the scene of natural activity as well as the field of preparation for release from bondage.

—T P Ramachandran,

The Concept of the Vyāvahārika in Advaita Vedānta, vii

piece of cloth has both cloth-ness and the absolute absence of everything else, even the cloth itself, in the threads. Thus, a piece of cloth cannot 'exist' in the threads. The cloth is, therefore, a false entity. In the same way, in Brahman, which is the unchanging material cause—*vivarta upādāna kāraṇa*—of this universe with all its diversity, the universe cannot be said to exist as a real entity. It is a mere appearance. Consequently, it is false.

A false entity is actually a provisional imposition or superimposition, termed *adhyāsa* by Acharya Shankara, on some substratum. What is falsely imposed could be an object of doubt, or it could masquerade as a certain cognition. In a snake-rope illusion it is certain, because the person who is superimposing the snake does not have any doubt in his mind about the reality of the snake which frightens him. But a superimposition could also present as a doubt, as when one wonders in the dark: 'Is that a post or a person?' Falsity may present as doubt in two ways: (i) doubt with respect to the evidence, and (ii) doubt with respect to what is evidenced. In connection with Self-knowledge or Self-inquiry, the first doubt is regarding the authenticity of the Vedantic texts. About Atman or Brahman we know from the Upanishads. Whether the Upanishads are a valid source of knowledge, one can know by studying the *Brahma Sutra* of Badarayana, which is largely based on the Upanishads. It is extremely important to ascertain the validity of a proof; otherwise, the object of proof will be of little use.

The Real Nature of the Self

Next, we turn to the doubt with respect to what is evidenced. It is generally accepted that proclamation of the true nature of the self is the unique teaching of the Upanishads. However, as everyone feels they know their self, people are generally not in a position to accept what the Upanishads declare about the self. They are quick to doubt the identity of the self and the supreme Reality. Is this identity ever present or does it occur after liberation? If the self is different from Brahman, does it possess di-

vine faculties like bliss or is it bereft of them? Or, do knowledge, bliss, and such other qualities constitute the very nature of the self?

At this point we can deal with the doubt about the significance of the terms *tat*, That, and *tvam*, you, in the Vedic dictum '*tat-tvam-asi*; you are That'. Here the doubt about the meaning of *tvam*, the individual self, assumes importance. People doubt if the self is different from the body, mind, and sense organs. If different, what would be the size of the self? Is it atomic, or of the size of the body. Or, is it all-pervading though residing within the body? In case it is all-pervading, do concepts like agency and enjoyer-ship apply to the self? If so, does the self become many or does it remain singular?

Similarly, there could be doubt with respect to the meaning of the term *tat*. The statement *tat-tvam-asi*, when interpreted in the light of its original context in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, conveys the sense that Ishvara, the Supreme Lord, is one with the individual self. This initiates a controversy about the significance of the term 'Ishvara'. Does 'Ishvara' refer to the Supreme Being having an anthropomorphic form and ruling the whole universe while presiding over such spheres as Vaikuntha? Or, is he devoid of any corporeal form? Is he the omniscient Creator, and does he create this universe independent of any material cause? Or, is the Supreme Lord both the material and efficient cause of this universe? Many such doubts may crop up in a spiritual seeker's mind and can be removed by the study and reflection of the first and second chapters of the *Brahma Sutra*. The doubt with respect to the steps to Self-knowledge, or the state of spiritual liberation and its nature, constitute the second type of doubt: *prameya samśaya*, doubt about what is declared in the scriptures.

Now, let us consider the issue of falsity that presents as a certain knowledge, as in the case of the snake-rope illusion. It is well known that the Advaitins take help of this example to point out the falsity of the universe, which is of great importance to them. By pointing out this falsity they actually intend to arrive at the conclusion that Brahman

alone is real, our petty selfhood is a misconception, and the universe is one with Brahman, or there is no independent entity called the universe.

When both the object and its knowledge are contradicted at a later point of time for reasons other than doubt, it is a case of doubtless or certain falsity. The illusory snake ceases to appear and we can get over its false knowledge when the rope comes to our sight. Here, both snake and its cognition are contradicted, whereas the rope continues to exist and is provisionally uncontradicted. That which is uncontradicted could be of two types: perennial and provisional. Brahman is uncontradicted in the proper sense of the term. It is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. The worldly objects are uncontradicted till the dawn of the knowledge of Brahman. The things that are contradicted fall under two categories: (i) apparent manifestation of *cit*, consciousness, limited by phenomenal objects; and (ii) apparent manifestation of *cit* limited by illusory objects. Material objects, a jar for instance, are examples of the first category, whereas the illusory snake apprehended in a rope is an example of the second category.

It goes without saying that our false knowledge about our self, that we are a psychophysical entity, is beyond doubt. We habitually associate ourselves with the gross physical body, mind, sense organs, and so on, and express ourselves accordingly: 'I am strong and stout', 'I am happy', 'I am miserable', 'I am deaf'. In all such cases of superimposition there is an appearance of something which has a different order of existence with respect to its locus, that is, the Self. According to non-dualistic Vedanta, *cit* pervades everything and is the locus in all cases of superimposition. The whole universe is superimposed upon Brahman, which is Consciousness and the original cause of the appearance of the world. All empirical dealings, including the case of the snake-rope illusion, take place due to that original superimposition. Thus, Advaitins hold that consciousness alone is the locus of superimposition. In the case of the snake-rope illusion—expressed in such words as 'this is a snake'—too, the conscious-

ness circumscribed by rope is the locus. It is not different from the consciousness delimited by the mental state which has 'this' as its object. Here, consciousness has transcendental reality while the rope belongs to the phenomenally real. The consciousness circumscribed by the rope, which is part of phenomenal reality, is also considered phenomenal. The snake and its cognition, instantly produced by the power of ignorance pertaining to the consciousness limited by the rope, have only illusory reality. Thus, the locus and what is imposed upon it have different orders of reality, and the definition of superimposition strictly applies here. Similarly, when someone says, 'I am a human being' or 'I am deaf', they superimpose their body having the external features of a human being or the deafness of the ear upon their self. All these are cases of erroneous perception, which are immediate in nature. In committing such mistakes we do not require any external help. False knowledge that is immediate in nature can be overcome by immediate right knowledge, which is the knowledge of Brahman. Here comes the utility of the study of Vedanta. The knowledge of Vedanta removes false knowledge about the Atman; and this alone leads to liberation.



Notes and References

1. Acharya Shankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*, 1.1.2.
2. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.2.12.
3. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.4.5.
4. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 6.14.2.
5. Chitsukhacharya, *Tattvapradipika* (Delhi: Chaukhamba, 1987), 32.
6. Padmapadacharya, *Panchapadika* (Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1958), 23.
7. *Ādyam syāt pañcapādyuktam tato vivaraṇodite; Citsukhīyam caturtham syādantyam-ānandabodhajam.*
8. *Sarveśām-āpi bhāvānām svāśrayatvena sammatē; Pratiyogitvam-atyantābhāvam prati mṛṣātmatā.* — *Tattvapradipika*, 39.
9. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 6.1.4.

The Six Means of Knowledge in Advaita Vedanta

Swami Alokananda

EVERLASTING HAPPINESS is a universal desire. It is for happiness—both mundane and other-worldly—that humans perform various actions. But there is no end to desire. Desires keep cropping up, one after the other. On meeting mundane fulfilment, desires only increase in intensity, just like fire fed with ghee. And the pleasures of heaven end in the continuation of the cycle of birth and death: ‘*Kṣīṇe puṇye martya-lokaṁ viśanti*; they enter the mortal world on the exhaustion of their merit.’¹ Thus, the chain of repeated births and deaths goes on: ‘*Punarapi jananaṁ punarapi maraṇam*; there is birth again, there is death again.’² Only if all our desires could be fulfilled would we possibly be satisfied. But it is not possible to attain this state of the *āpta-kāma* without Self-realization.

Dharma, virtue, *artha*, wealth, and *kāma*, pleasure, three of the *puruṣārthas*, aims of human life, are transient, and so are their results. But *mokṣa*, liberation, the fourth *puruṣārtha*, is everlasting. That is why the sages proclaim mokṣa as the ultimate *puruṣārtha*: ‘*Caturvidha-puruṣārtheṣu mokṣa eva parama-puruṣārthaḥ*; among the four human ends, liberation alone is supreme.’³ The *Chhandogya Upanishad* says: ‘*Tarati śokam-ātmavit*; the knower of Self transcends grief.’⁴ The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* announces: ‘*Tam-eva viditvā’ti-mṛtyum-eti nānyaḥ panthā vidyate*’*yanāya*; knowing Him alone one transcends death, there is no other way to follow.’⁵ ‘*Rte jñānāṇa muktiḥ*; there is no liberation except through Self-knowledge’ is a fundamental

tenet of Advaita Vedanta. These statements affirm that mokṣa is possible only through the knowledge of Brahman.

Jñeya or *prameya*, objects of knowledge, are of two kinds: *vyāvahārika*, pragmatically or relatively real, and *pāramārthika*, absolutely real. All objects of knowledge other than Brahman are *vyāvahārika*. They are valid at the *vyāvahārika* level of worldly activity but are sublated at the *pāramārthika* level of the Absolute. Brahman alone exists at the *pāramārthika* level. It remains unchanged at all times; in fact, it transcends the category of time. This has been described variously in the Shruti and Smṛiti texts. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* says: ‘*Sad-eva somyedam-agra āsīt*; O noble one (Shvetaketu), in the beginning this was Existence alone.’⁶ It also says: ‘*Tat-tvam-asi*; you are That’ (6.12.3). All these texts refer to the one object of knowledge at the *pāramārthika* level, unaffected by time. It is also the sole subject matter of the Upanishads. It is only by attaining this knowledge that a jiva attains mokṣa.

Now the question is: How to attain this knowledge? The means of this knowledge are called *pramāṇas* in Indian philosophy. It has been said, ‘*Prameya-siddhiḥ pramāṇāt hi*; it is only through valid means that an object of knowledge is known.’⁷ We have two types of knowledge: *bhrama*, erroneous, and *pramā*, valid. Erroneous knowledge gets sublated when its cause is removed. For example, the illusory snake perceived in a rope vanishes as soon as the reason for this illusion—darkness or weak eyesight, for instance—is removed. That is why the knowledge based on an object liable to be sublated is called ‘erroneous knowledge’. On the other hand, the knowledge of objects not likely

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to be sublated in future is *pramā*, true knowledge. *Pramāṇas* are the instruments of valid knowledge: '*pramā-karaṇaṁ pramāṇam*.'⁸

There are differences of opinion among Indian philosophers regarding the means of valid knowledge. The Charvakas accept perception alone as means of valid knowledge; the Buddhists and Vaisheshikas accept perception and inference as valid means; the Sankhyas and Yogins, perception, inference, and verbal testimony; the Naiyayikas, perception, inference, comparison, and verbal testimony. The Prabhakara Mimamsakas acknowledge presumption as a valid means in addition to the other four, while the Bhatta Mimamsakas and Vedantins posit the following six as valid means of knowledge: perception, inference, comparison, verbal testimony, presumption, and non-apprehension. The Pauranikas speak of two additional means—equivalence and tradition—taking the total to eight.⁹

Perception

Pratyakṣa, perception, is the basis of all the other means of knowledge and is also considered superior to them in the empirical realm. All other *pramāṇas* are dependent on *pratyakṣa*. A fire in front can be perceived through the eyes; but inferring that 'the yonder hill is on fire because smoke is seen atop it' is contingent on the prior perception of the invariable concomitance of smoke and fire. Similarly, in the case of other *pramāṇas* also perception has an important role to play.

The *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* says: '*Vijñātāram-are kena vijānīyāt*; through what, O (Maitreyi), should one know the Knower?'¹⁰ Also: '*Tad-adreśyam-agrāhyam*; It cannot be perceived and grasped.'¹¹ The Atman cannot be perceived as an object. Were the Atman to become perceptible as an object, its *mithyātva*, falsity, would also be established, because that which is perceptible by the senses is transitory, non-eternal, and false. But, paradoxically, the fears of worldly existence will not go without direct realization of the Atman. And moksha is attained as soon as the fears of the world are destroyed.

Though all philosophers accept perception as a valid *pramāṇa*, they differ about the details of the process of perception. The Charvakas hold the gross body to be the means of direct perception and consider its preservation their highest *puruṣārtha*. The Naiyayikas hold that perception is of two types. According to them, '*Indriyārthasannikarṣa-janyaṁ jñānaṁ pratyakṣam*'; perception is the knowledge born of contact between a sense organ and its object.'¹² But this definition of perception does not cover the God's knowledge and thus suffers from *avyāpti doṣa*, the defect of non-comprehensiveness. God's knowledge, Naiyayikas argue, does not arise out of the contact of sense organs with objects, because this knowledge is eternal and God is not known to have sense organs. To correct this defect, the Naiyayikas introduce a second characteristic of perception: '*Jñānākaraṇakaṁ jñānaṁ pratyakṣam*'; a cognition that does not have another cognition as its chief instrumental cause is termed perception.'¹³

The Vedantins, however, proclaim that perceptual knowledge is nothing but Brahman. The Upanishads also declare: '*Yad-eva sāṅśād-āparokṣād-brahma*'; that Brahman indeed is immediate and direct.'¹⁴ Perceptual knowledge, according to Vedanta, is nothing but pure Consciousness. The same unitary Consciousness becomes threefold: (i) *viśayagata caitanya*, consciousness associated with objects, (ii) *pramāṇa caitanya*, consciousness associated with the means of knowledge, and (iii) *pramātr caitanya*, consciousness associated with the subject or knower. In the process of visual perception, Vedantins say, the *antaḥkaraṇa*, mind, issues out through the eyes to the object and takes the form of the object. This transformation of the mind is called *vṛtti* and it functions as the *pramāṇa caitanya*, which links the *pramātr caitanya* with the *viśayagata caitanya*. It may be worth remembering that, according to Vedantins, even inanimate objects are products of, and are therefore underpinned by, Consciousness. The 'unified' presence of the three divisions of Consciousness at the same locus constitutes valid knowledge.

Incidentally, perception need not be of external objects alone. It may be of cognition too. 'I perceive a pot' is an example of the former; and 'I perceive the knowledge of the pot' of the latter.

Perception again is of two kinds: *savikalpaka*, determinate, and *nirvikalpaka*, indeterminate. The knowledge which apprehends the relationship between a substantive and its qualifying attribute is called determinate knowledge. Thus, when we say 'I know the jar', we have the knowledge of the qualifying attribute of 'jar-ness' in the clay or ceramic object in front of us. Indeterminate knowledge does not apprehend such a relation. When one says 'This is that Devadatta whom I saw the other day', only the person of Devadatta is objectified, for his attributes may well have changed in the last few days. This distinction is especially made to underscore the unitary attributeless nature of the Consciousness revealed by such Vedantic statements as *tat-tvam-asi*.

The Naiyayikas object to the latter use of the concept of indeterminate knowledge on the ground that the knowledge arising out of a spoken sentence is dependent on the 'interrelation' of its constituent words and their associated meanings. The meaning of the command 'Bring the cow' is dependent on the understanding of the meanings of the terms 'bring' and 'cow'. Similarly, knowledge arising out of the sentence 'you are That' also involves knowledge of what is 'you' and what is 'That'. Therefore, it cannot be indeterminate.

To this objection Vedantins reply that knowledge arising out of a sentence is not primarily or merely dependent on the interrelatedness of individual word meanings but on their *tātparya*, purport. Thus, when at lunch one asks for *saindhava*, rock-salt, the server does not go looking for a horse from Sindh, which is also one of the meanings of the term *saindhava*. The author of *Vedanta Paribhasha* reminds us that in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, in the passage 'beginning with "This universe, my dear, was but Existence in the beginning" and concluding with, "It is the truth, It is the Self, and thou art That, O Śvetaketu", the intended purport

of Vedantic texts is held to be the Pure Brahman. So how can it express something that is not the intended meaning? That sentences like, "Thou art That", convey a simple notion of identity, only means that they produce valid knowledge that does not apprehend the relation (among the meanings of the words in them).'¹⁵

Perception is further classified into two: (i) *jīva-sākṣin*, that due to the witness in the individual self; and (ii) *īśvara-sākṣin*, that due to the witness in God. The jiva is Consciousness limited by the mind. Hence, the witness in the individual self is also limited; and as minds are plural, so are jivas. But God is Consciousness limited by maya, the cosmic illusion. Maya is all-pervading, unlimited, and one. Therefore Ishvara, conditioned by maya, is also all-pervading, unlimited, and one. If maya is mentioned as manifold in some scriptural texts, it is only with respect to its threefold constituents—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—and their effects.

Though Brahman is all-pervading and evertrue, we are unable to perceive this fact due to ignorance. By knowing the identity of Brahman and Atman, one's own Self, all the miseries of a person come to an end. It is ignorance that thwarts valid knowledge and keeps us in the throes of a cosmic illusion. On the empirical *vyāvahārika* plane this illusion does not get sublated. That is why the world, an effect of maya, and all our day-to-day interactions have an empirical reality. When the reality of the *vyāvahārika* plane is effectively negated through proper discernment, the semblance of reality which remains is called *prātibhāsika*. Both the *vyāvahārika* and *prātibhāsika* planes are, however, based on the *pāramārthika* plane. When the falsity of maya and its effects is established, the identity of Brahman with the individual soul on the *pāramārthika* plane is also established. Thus, one's sufferings in this world come to an end and moksha, the highest *puruṣārtha*, is attained. According to Advaita Vedanta, even a little difference between the individual soul and Brahman is a deterrent to valid perception and causes fear and misery to the jiva. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* declares:

'Yadā hyevaīṣa etasminn-udaramantaraṁ kurute atha tasya bhayaṁ bhavati; whenever the aspirant creates the slightest difference in It [Brahman], he is smitten with fear.'¹⁶

Inference

Anumiti-karaṇam-anumānam; inference is the instrument of inferential knowledge.¹⁷ This knowledge is produced by the apprehension of *vyāpti*, invariable concomitance, between the *sādhya*, the thing to be inferred, and the *hetu*, the ground for inference. That is why it has been said: '*Anumiti-karaṇaṁca vyāpti-jñānam*; the instrument of inferential knowledge is the knowledge of invariable concomitance' (69). 'Where there is smoke, there is fire' is a commonly cited example of invariable concomitance. One who has perceived this association earlier can later infer that 'the hill is on fire' on seeing smoke on the hill. Inference is thus based on the latent mental impressions of the knowledge of invariable concomitance. Though inferential knowledge establishes the presence of fire on the hill, it does not clarify the extent of the fire, because there is no contact of the sense organs with the fire. The hill is directly perceived, but the presence of fire there is inferred.

Vedantins also present inference as proof of the unreality of the universe. This inference is based on the denial of all objective entities in the pure Existence that is Brahman. Therefore, the entire universe other than Brahman is unreal because, being separate from Brahman, they have no 'real' existence, much like the nacre mistaken for silver. Though an object may be apparently seen in a place where it does not actually exist, its non-existence there can be proved through discernment. You surely cannot make nacre function like silver! Falsity is, therefore, defined as 'the counter-positive of the absolute non-existence that abides in whatever is supposed to be its substratum' (77). Advaitins, however, accept *vyāvahārika satya*, empirical or conventional existence. When we say 'the pot is there', the pot has a *vyāvahārika* or perceptual existence. It is only on the *pāramāṛthika* plane of the Absolute that

Advaitins deny conventional reality, for the true nature of Brahman is pure Consciousness devoid of attributes.

Comparison

The instrument of the valid knowledge of similarity is *upamāna*, comparison. After seeing cows in villages, when one sees a gayal in a forest, one says, 'This animal is like a cow.' One also has the conviction, 'My cow is like this.' This is the knowledge of similarity obtained by 'a process of agreement and difference'. It is an indirect piece of knowledge and not a direct perception, as the 'cow' was not in contact with the sense organs when the gayal was perceived. This means of knowledge cannot be classed under inference either, for knowledge of invariable concomitance is not involved herein. Moreover, that inference and comparison are not the same is indicated by the two distinct apperceptions 'I am inferring' and 'I am comparing'.

Vedanta accepts comparison as a proof of valid knowledge because of its special use in attaining the knowledge of Brahman. Though the philosophers do not dwell upon comparison much, it has great significance in popular and Vedic usage, literature, and poetry. In Vedanta, the all-pervasiveness of Brahman has been portrayed in sentences like '*Akāśavat sarvagataśca nityaḥ*; (it is) all-pervading like space and is eternal' and '*Yathā prakāśayatyekalḥ kṛtsnaṁ lokam-imam raviḥ*; as the single sun illumines this whole world'.¹⁸ In fact, the metaphor of the sun has been variedly used to describe the self-luminous nature of the Atman.

Presumption

The assumption of a cause on seeing an effect is called *arthāpatti*, presumption. For instance, if 'the stout Devadatta does not eat in the daytime', then it is easy for a thoughtful person to conclude that Devadatta eats well at night. One cannot, after all, grow stout without eating. This assumption of eating at night in the face of the stoutness of a person who does not eat by the day is a case of *arthāpatti pramā*, presumptive knowledge.

Presumption is of two kinds: *dr̥ṣṭārthāpatti*, presumption from what is seen, and *śrutārthāpatti*, presumption from what is heard. The example of Devadatta cited above is a case of presumption from seen facts. An Upanishadic statement may be quoted as an example of presumption from what is heard: ‘*Tarati śokam-ātmavit*; the knower of the Self transcends grief.’¹⁹ If grief were real, it could not have been transcended by the knowledge of the Self, for reality involves existence at all times. Vedantins point out that to kill a real snake a stick is required. But the snake imagined on a rope in the dark is removed by the correct perceptive knowledge of the rope. Similarly, if the bondage of the world were real, then some means other than mere knowledge would have been required to destroy it; Self-knowledge alone could not have destroyed it. But, as the Vedic statement ‘*Tarati śokam-ātmavit*’ is accepted as true, all suffering and bondage must be superimposed on the Self due to lack of Self-knowledge. This insight provides the spiritual aspirant with conviction to engage in Vedantic contemplation with enthusiasm and become liberated from bondage by the non-dual experience of the Atman. In this way, presumptive knowledge is also of use in attaining the knowledge of Brahman.

Presumption from what is heard is again of two types: *abhidhānānupapatti*, that due to failure of expression or intention, and *abhihitānupapatti*, that due to incongruity of meaning.²⁰ When on hearing a part of a sentence one assumes what is unheard, then that is a case of *abhidhānānupapatti*. For example, on hearing the words ‘the door’, one may assume the request ‘shut it’, if the context is appropriate.

Abhihitānupapatti is said to exist when the meaning of a sentence is incongruous with known facts and demands an additional assumption. Thus, the Vedic statement ‘*Svargakāmo jyotiṣṭoma yajeta*; one who desires heaven should perform the Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifice’ posits the Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifice as leading to heaven. However, the sacrifice is over within a fixed period of time, and the sacrificer continues to live on earth. To explain this incon-

gruity, the Mimamsakas, Vedic exegetes, postulate the concept of *apūrvā*, unseen result, which acts as an intermediary and lasts till the fruition of the actual result, reaching heaven after death.

Verbal Testimony

A sentence in which the intended relation between the meanings of its constituent words is not contradicted by any other proof of valid knowledge is a means of verbal testimony. The knowledge arising from such sentences is *āgama pramāṇa*, valid verbal testimony. Vedantins construe *āgama pramāṇa* as being of two kinds: *pauruṣeya*, of human origin, and *apauruṣeya*, of divine origin. The Vedas are considered *apauruṣeya* or impersonal because, according to Vedantins, at the time of the Creation the Vedas are projected exactly as they were in the previous cosmic cycle. Swami Vivekananda pointed out that ‘the whole body of supersensuous truths, having no beginning or end, and called by the name of the Vedas, is ever-existent. The Creator Himself is creating, preserving, and destroying the universe with the help of these truths.’²¹ In this sense too the Vedas are *apauruṣeya*. On the other hand, human literary creations like the Mahabharata are independent of any similar previous verbal text. They are thus fresh human creations and are therefore *pauruṣeya*.

The knowledge arising from a sentence is dependent on four factors: *ākāṃṣā*, expectancy, *yogyatā*, consistency, *āsatti*, contiguity, and *tātparyajñāna*, knowledge of intention. A sentence contains many words; on hearing the verb, we are eager to know its object. Similarly, on hearing the word denoting the object, we are curious to know the verb governing it. This mutual inquiry is termed ‘expectancy’. For instance, soon after hearing the word ‘bring’, one expects words signifying objects: ‘the book’, ‘the pen’, and the like.

‘Consistency’ lies in the meanings of constituent words being mutually non-contradictory. When one says, ‘*Vahninā siñcati*, he is irrigating (the plants with) fire’, listeners are not likely to make any sense of the sentence unless they see an obvious metaphorical usage. ‘Contiguous utterance’ is

another prerequisite for conveying meaning accurately. If one pronounces the word 'Ram' now and an hour later says 'come here', then one cannot expect Ram to understand the intended instruction.

The Naiyayikas declare: '*Vakturicchā tu tātparīyam*'; the desire of the speaker is called intention.'²² Vedantins do not accept this definition as being faultless. According to this Naiyayika definition, intention is only of the spoken words. But intention is understood even from a piece of writing. Further, when a person chants Vedic mantras like '*Bhadraṁ karṇebhiḥ śṛṇuyāma devāḥ*; O gods, may we hear auspicious words with the ears'²³ without understanding the meaning, it is seen that people conversant with Sanskrit are able to grasp the meaning. Therefore, Vedantins declare: '*Tatpratīti-janana-yogyatvaṁ tātparīyam*'; intention is the capacity to produce the cognition of a particular thing.'²⁴ The sentence 'There is a jar in the house' produces the cognition of the relation of the house, which is the substratum, and the pot held by the substratum. However, this sentence does not produce the cognition of the relation between a piece of cloth and the house, for that is not its intention.

Therefore, even if a person ignorant of the meaning of the words utters Vedic texts, the listener understands its meaning due to the presence of *tātparīya*, intention, the capability to produce the cognition of the relation between the meanings of the constituent words. Even an atheist can understand the meaning of Vedic texts because intention is inherent in the sentences and is not subservient to the speaker.

It is accepted that words have an inherent power of signification, *vācya śakti*, which gives them meaning. Therefore, this inherent power can be said to be the supporting cause for the cognition of the meaning of words. When the direct denotation is not applicable, then an implied meaning, *lakṣaṇā*, has to be resorted to.

The knowledge obtained from verbal testimony may be either direct or indirect. For instance, the sentence 'There are ten persons in yonder house'

produces indirect knowledge, while the sentence 'You are the tenth person here' produces direct knowledge. Similarly, an aspirant endowed with the preliminary qualifications for spiritual life gets the indirect knowledge of Brahman from the sentence '*Asti brahma*; Brahman exists.'²⁵ Then, when they hear the *mahāvākya* '*tat-tvam-asi*' from a guru established in the knowledge of Brahman, they attain direct experiential knowledge, *aparokṣa jñāna*, of Brahman as '*Ahaṁ brahmāsmi*; I am Brahman.'²⁶ Therefore, Brahman is called '*aupaniṣada puruṣa*', because the nature of Brahman can be known only through the statements of the Upanishads. Though the Vedic sentences are cognized with the help of the ear, these same statements establish the falsity of the sense organs and related means of knowledge in the context of the absolute reality of Brahman. On attaining this unitary knowledge of Brahman one becomes fulfilled. This attainment is the highest *puruṣārtha*.

Non-apprehension

Vedantins consider *anupalabdhi*, non-apprehension, as a separate means of knowledge, distinct from perception, which reveals the non-existence of the entities concerned. This distinction is important because when one records 'the absence of a pot on the ground', there is no visual contact with any perceptible entity other than the ground; and sense contact, Vedantins note, is an essential component of perception. The knowledge of the non-existence of the pot is thus the product of non-apprehension, which is a piece of knowledge in itself.


Four types of non-existence are recognized by Vedantins: *prāgabhāva*, prior non-existence; *pradhvaṁsābhāva*, non-existence as destruction; *atyantābhāva*, absolute non-existence; and *anyonyābhāva*, mutual non-existence. The absence of a pot in the clay before its production is termed 'prior non-existence'. When after being manufactured the pot is broken down with a stick, then this is a case of 'non-existence as destruction'. Air does not have any form; it never had, nor will it ever have one. This absence of form at all times—

past, present, and future—is called ‘absolute non-existence’. A pot is not a cloth, and neither is a cloth a pot. This is ‘mutual non-existence’.

Mutual non-existence is further classified into two on the basis of its substratum having a beginning, *sādi*, or not, *anādi*. Thus, the absence of a cloth in a pot is contingent on the manufacture of the pot, but the absence of individual souls in Brahman is without beginning, for Brahman is eternally impartite. These differences are also classified as *sopādhika*, conditioned, and *nirupādhika*, unconditioned. For instance, though space is unitary, containers and houses create the impression of difference by delimitation. This is called conditioned difference. But the difference between the pot and the cloth is free of any such conditioning factors, *upādhis*.

Though there is no difference in the indivisible Consciousness that is Brahman on the *pāramārthika* plane, differences are seen between the individual soul and God in the universe created through *mayā*. When *avidyā*, the individual aspect of *mayā*, is negated through a direct experience of the identity of the individual soul and Brahman, all differentiation—the effect of *avidyā*—is also destroyed. This leaves the realized soul with the indivisible non-dual experience of Brahman: Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute. As the dream world does not exist for a person who has awakened from sleep, for an illumined person who has attained to the *pāramārthika* plane *mayā* and its effect, the universe, cease to be.

This direct experiential knowledge of Brahman is the ultimate human end, the highest *puruṣārtha*. Advaita Vedānta accepts the six means of knowledge as aids to attaining this *puruṣārtha*. Some teachers of Advaita believe that a sequential process of *śravaṇa*, hearing Vedāntic dicta from a competent teacher, *manana*, reflection on those dicta, and *nididhyāsana*, meditation on their purport, leads to the knowledge of the identity of the individual soul and Brahman. Others aver that the qualified aspirant free from the defects of *asambhāvanā*, doubt, and *viparīta bhāvanā*, erroneous conceptions, at-

tains the knowledge of Brahman immediately on hearing any of the Vedāntic *mahāvākyas*, like *tat-tvam-asi*. Such competent ‘hearing’ directly removes all doubt about the validity of Vedāntic statements through a direct apprehension of Reality. When this does not occur, *manana* is needed to remove doubt regarding the identity of the individual soul and Brahman, while *nididhyāsana* aids the establishment in Brahman by negating erroneous conceptions contrary to truth. 

Notes and References

1. Bhagavadgita, 9.21.
2. Shankaracharya, ‘Charpata-panjarika-stotra’, 8.
3. See Dharmaraja Adhvarindra, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 3–4.
4. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 7.1.3.
5. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 3.8; 6.15.
6. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 6.2.1.
7. Ishvarakrishna, *Sankhya Karika*, 4.
8. *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, 4.
9. *Pratyakṣam-ekam cārvākāḥ kṣāṇāda-sugatau punaḥ Anumānaṅca taccātha sāṅkhyāḥ śabdaśca te api; Nyāyaikadeśino’py-evam-upamānaṅca kecana Arthāpatyā sahaitāni catvāry-āha prābhākaraḥ; Abhāva-śaṣṭhāny-etāni bhāṭṭa-vedāntinas-tathā; Sambhava-aitihyaṅy-uktāni tāni paurāṇikā jaguḥ.* Varadarajacharya, *Tarkika Raksha* (Varanasi, 1903), 56.
10. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.4.14.
11. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.6.
12. Annambhatta, *Tarka Sangraha*, section 42.
13. See Stephen H Philips and N S Ramanuja Tatacharya, *Epistemology of Perception* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009), 334.
14. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.4.2.
15. *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, 35–6.
16. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.7.1.
17. *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, 68.
18. *Brahma Sutra*, 2.3.4; Gita, 13.33.
19. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 7.1.3.
20. *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, 120.
21. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 6.181.
22. *Bhasha Pariccheda*, 84.
23. *Rig Veda*, 1.89.8.
24. *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, 106–7.
25. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.6.1.
26. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.10.

Vedanta as the Culmination of Vedic Thought

Prof. Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti

VEDANTA PRIMARILY MEANS the Upanishads, and secondarily the system of philosophy based on them: *Vedānto nāmopaniṣat-pramāṇaṁ tad-upakārīṇi śārīraka-sūtrādīni ca*.¹ Various views have been expressed to explain why the Upanishads are called Vedanta. The word 'Vedanta' literally means 'the end of the Vedas'. This meaning is justifiable, for the Upanishads constitute the final of the four literary genres that constitute the Vedic literature. Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka, and Upanishad—that is the usual order of enumerating these genres. And this order of enumeration is again justified by the chronological position of the four genres. The Upanishads may rightly be called Vedanta, not only because they were perceived or composed during the last phase of the Vedic compilation, and hence are usually placed at the end of the total corpus, but also because they represent the culmination of Vedic thought, the final message of the Vedas.

It was supposed at one time that the Upanishads 'really represent a new religion, which is in virtual opposition to the ritual or practical side (*karma-kāṇḍa*)'.² The supposed contradiction between the *karma-kāṇḍa* and *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, the knowledge portion, is the result of a misinterpretation. Indeed, there are observations in the Upanishads that compare Vedic ritual with supreme knowledge, and in this comparison ritual is given a low rank as its results are finite, whereas supreme knowledge takes one beyond this cycle of birth and death. There were seers equally proficient in both karma and jnana,

and that has always remained the spirit of Vedantic practice. The two *kāṇḍas* are meant for two different aspirants. Purity of mind resulting from the performance of compulsory rites is a prerequisite for being entitled to follow the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*.

Continuity of thought can easily be discerned in Vedic texts. The fundamental teachings of Vedanta were not something totally unknown to the earlier genres. That which was stated in early Vedic texts very briefly was later elucidated in the Upanishad in further details. What was in germ form in earlier texts blossomed into the fundamental doctrines of the Upanishads, serving as the basis on which the grand edifice of Vedanta philosophy was built later on. An attempt is made in this article to trace how far the cardinal thoughts of the Upanishads can be traced to the Samhitas and the Brahmanas.

Continuity of Thought in Vedic Literature

The Upanishads themselves admit the continuity of Vedic thought. The *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* (2.4.10) recognizes all the Vedas as emanating from a single source: the *mahat bhūta*, Supreme Being. This indicates the common source and goal of the Vedas. In the view of the *Katha Upanishad* (1.3.15), all the Vedas aim at a single object: Om, which is Brahman.

Many mantras from the Samhitas and the Brahmanas are found cited in the Upanishads. This clearly shows that the Upanishadic seers believed the germs of their teachings were already in the Vedas, which they cited to corroborate their views.

The view of Mahidasa Aitareya, the seer of the *Aitareya Brahmana*, a *karma-kāṇḍa* text, is men-

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tioned in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (3.16.7), in support of the conception of life as a sacrifice. Yajnavalkya, traditionally regarded as the seer of the White Yajur Veda, a pre-eminently *karma-kāṇḍa* text, figures as the greatest knower of Brahman of his time in the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*. It may not be accidental that the *Isha Upanishad* is placed at the end of the White Yajur Veda, and the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* at the end of the *Shatapatha Brahmana*. The placement probably indicates continuity and that the Upanishads—or Vedanta—are the culmination of Vedic thought.

The Vedas give no definite system of philosophy or systematic exposition of any particular doctrine; they contain what different seers—not all belonging to the same age—thought or realized. Realization varies from seer to seer, and only a limited number of people reach the Vedantic realization of Brahman, the highest goal; the others tell us as far as their realization goes. Vedic seers are sometimes obscure—maybe because of their choice of the *parokṣa*, indirect, way of expressing their realizations. Some mantras of the ‘*Asya Vamasya Sukta*’ of the Rig Veda (1.164) are composed in a symbolic and mystical language, sometimes enigmatic.

Attempts have been made to discover many later Vedantic ideas in earlier Vedic texts by means of mystic and symbolic interpretations of the Rig Veda hymns—ingeniously, but not always convincingly. The Vedanta system believes that the whole of the Vedas expresses one homogenous doctrine, that of the unity of existence. It may not be fair to claim that all the Vedantic and monistic doctrines are found in the Vedas. But, at the same time, the remarkable continuity of thought found in Vedic literature cannot be denied; and several hymns of the Rig Veda already reveal the development of a monistic trend.

Rituals and Worship in Vedic Literature

Sayanacharya explains the Vedic hymns mainly from the ritual standpoint, because that is his professed object. But he too admits that the contents of the Vedic hymns are not concerned only with rituals—

and modern scholars do not regard the Rig Veda as a book of rituals either. Sayanacharya observes that a spiritual or Vedantic meaning may be implied in many verses, whereas in some of them the Vedantic meaning is quite explicitly stated. He himself offers alternative interpretations from different standpoints, for example in his commentary on the ‘*Asya Vamasya Sukta*’—particularly the verse ‘*Dvā suparmā sayujā sakhāyā ...*’ (1.164.20), which also appears in the Atharva Veda (9.9.20) and has been incorporated in the *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.1.1). The analogy of two birds resorting to one and the same tree has been used in this verse for showing the relation between the embodied soul and the Supreme Soul.

The Vedic hymns are mostly prayers to the Vedic devas, gods—‘deva’ is derived from the root *div*, ‘to shine’; ‘deva’ is ‘one who shines’. Deva is thus very closely connected with *jyotis*, light. The Vedic seers were worshippers of light: ‘*Tisrah prajā āryā jyotir-agrāḥ*; three are their noble progeny, bearing light ahead.’³ The Vedic gods are said to dispel darkness: ‘*Apa dhvāntam-ūrnuhi pūrdhi cakṣuh*; dispel darkness and fill full our vision’ (10.73.11). In the earth, Agni is *jyotis*: ‘*Ni tvām-agne manur-dadhe jyotir-janāya śāsvate*; Manu established you, O Agni, light for all beings’ (1.36.19). In the atmospheric region, Indra is the god who makes one reach *abhaya jyotis*, fearless refulgence, far beyond darkness: ‘*Uru-aśyām-abhayam jyotir-indra mā no dīrghā abhi naśantamisirāḥ*’ (2.27.14). In the celestial region, the sun is the light par excellence (10.170.3). But the light that the gods impart is not only physical light, it is in fact illumination within. This light is *amṛta*, immortal (6.9.4). The seers wanted to achieve this light in this life: ‘*jīvā jyotir-aśīmahi*’ (7.32.26); and through meditation: ‘*uru jyotir-vividur-dīdhyānāḥ*’ (7.90.4).

In the Upanishads the Supreme Being is also called ‘Deva’. For example, ‘*Deva ekaḥ*; the one Deva’⁴; ‘*Adhyātma-yogādhigamena devam matvā dhīro harṣa-śokau jahāti*; meditating on the Deva through concentration of mind the wise person gives up joy and sorrow’⁵; ‘*Yo devo agnau yo’psu*; the Deva that is in fire and in water’⁶; and so on. To the seer of the Yajur Veda, Brahman resembles the sun:

*brahma sūrya-samam jyotiḥ*⁷; but the Upanishads go further in claiming that Brahman is the greatest light, before which all other lights fade away:

*Na tatra sūryo bhāti na candra-tāraṇam
nemā vidyuto bhānti kuto'yamagnih;
Tameva bhāntam-anubhāti sarvaṁ
tasya bhāsā sarvaṁ-idaṁ vibhāti.*

There the sun does not shine, neither do the moon and the stars; nor do these flashes of lightning shine; how can this fire? That shining, all these shine; through its lustre all these are variously illumined.⁸

The same expression, *jyotiṣām jyotiḥ*, which was used for the sun in the Rig Veda, is used also for Brahman in the *Mundaka Upanishad* (2.2.9): '*Tacchubhram jyotiṣām jyotiḥ*; it is pure and is the light of lights.'

Transition from darkness to light was the aim of the Vedic seers: '*Apāma somam-amṛtā abhūmāganma jyotir-avidāma devān*; we have drunk Soma and become immortal, we have attained the light and have known the gods.'⁹ In the Upanishads we come across the same aspiration: '*Tamaso mā jyotir-gamaya*; lead us from darkness to light.'¹⁰ The sunrise in the outer world symbolizes internal illumination.¹¹

Unity behind Plurality

The fundamental teaching of the Upanishads is to discover unity behind plurality. Unity is the Reality, and identification with this unity is to be achieved. The ultimate unity is variously called: Deva, Purusha, Akshara, Atman, and Brahman. The Samhitas and Brahmanas admit plurality of gods in their prayers and ritual practices. But, at the same time, the unity of gods did not escape the attention of the seers.

Largely similar—and sometimes even the same—epithets are often ascribed to various gods, which implies they were regarded as essentially one behind their apparent plurality. A god is often identified with other gods. Gritsamada addresses Agni as being identical with Indra, Vishnu, Brahma-

naspati, Mitra, Varuna, Aryaman, Tvashtri, Rudra, Maruts, Pushan, Savitri, and Bhaga, among others.¹² Similarly, Aditi is everything: '*Aditir-dyaur-aditir-antarikṣam-aditir-mātā sa pitā sa putrah*; Aditi is the heaven, Aditi the skies, Aditi is the mother, the father, the son' (1.89.10). The obvious conclusion is that the 'one God' is praised in different names and forms.

The one God has been explicitly proclaimed in several sections of the Vedic Samhitas as well as in the Upanishads: '*Eko devaḥ*; the one Deva' (10.51.1)¹³; '*Ekaḥ suparnaḥ*; the one Bird' (10.114.4); '*Eko devaḥ sarvabhūteṣu gūḍhaḥ*; the one Deva hidden in all beings'¹⁴; '*Eko hi rudro*; Rudra is but one' (3.2). The one God has become everything, as in the following expression of the Vedic seer:

*Eka evāgnir-bahudhā samiddha
ekaḥ sūryo viśvam-anu prabhūtaḥ;
Ekaivoṣaḥ sarvaṁ-idaṁ vi bhāty-
ekaṁ vā idaṁ vi babbhūva sarvaṁ.*

One is Agni kindled in many a place, one the Sun shining over all; One is Ushas illumining all this; the One has become all.¹⁵

The same idea is present in the Upanishads:

*Eko vaśī sarva-bhūtāntarātmā
ekaṁ rūpaṁ bahudhā yaḥ karoti
Tam-ātmasthaṁ ye'nupaśyanti dhīrās-
teṣāṁ sukhaṁ śāśvataṁ netaṛeṣāṁ.*

There is one Supreme Ruler, the innermost Self of all beings, who makes his one form manifold. Eternal happiness belongs to the wise who perceive him within themselves, not to others.¹⁶

Unity with the object of worship was achieved by some seers. In his *Nirukta*, Yaska mentions a threefold classification of mantras: *parokṣa-kṛta*, *pratyakṣa-kṛta*, and *ādhyātmika*, where the object of praise is indirectly perceived, directly perceived, and within oneself, respectively. In the *ādhyātmika* hymns the seers identify themselves with the Divine, the object of praise. The 'Devi Sukta' is a very famous example. In another sukta Brihaddiva Atharvana praises Indra, and concludes by announcing him-

self to be Indra: *Evā mahān brhaddivo atharvā'vocat svām tanvam-indram-eva* (10.120.9).

Vamadeva is famous as the seer of the fourth mandala of the Rig Veda. Vamadeva claims to have been Manu, Surya, Kakshivat, Kutsa, and Ushanas: *aham manur-abhavam sūryaś-cāham kakṣivām ṛṣir-asmi viprah* (4.26.1); in other words, he identifies himself with all of existence—and this identification is the goal of Vedanta: '*Aham brahmāsmi*, I am Brahman'; '*Sarvam khalv-idam brahma*, all this is indeed Brahman'. In the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upaniṣhad* (1.4.10) Vamadeva is presented as a knower of Brahman: '*Tad-dhaitat-paśyann-ṛṣir-vāmadevaḥ pratipede aham manur-abhavam sūryaś-ceti*; the sage Vamadeva, while realizing this (self) as That (Brahman), knew "I was Manu, and the sun"'. In the *Aitareya Upaniṣhad* (2.1.5) too, in the context of *tṛtīya janma*, third birth, Vamadeva announces: 'Even while lying in the womb, I came to know of the birth of all the gods. A hundred iron citadels held me down. Then, like a hawk, I forced my way through by dint of the knowledge of the Self.'

The Creator of the Universe

'The evolution of religious thought in the *Rig Veda* led to the conception of a creator distinct from any of the chief deities and superior to all the gods. He appears under the various names of Purusha, Viśvakarman, Hiranyagarbha, or Prajāpati in the cosmogonic hymns.'¹⁷ In some Vedic hymns the gods in general, or various individual deities, 'generated' the world. But only one God as the efficient creator is also known:

*Viśvataś-caṣur-uta viśvato-mukho
viśvato-bāhur-uta viśvatas-pāt;
Saṁ bāhubhyāṁ dhamati saṁ-patatirair-
dyāvābhūmī janayan deva ekaḥ.*

Its eyes are everywhere, its face everywhere, its arms everywhere, and its feet everywhere. The one Deity, while creating heaven and earth, endows (human beings) with hands, and (birds) with wings.¹⁸

Hiranyagarbha is celebrated as the first born,

the creator and sustainer of the universe, in whom contradictions are resolved: '*Yasya chāyāmṛtaṁ yasya mṛtyuḥ*; whose shadow is immortality, whose (shadow) is death' (10.121.2). In ritual texts, the Brahmanas in particular, Prajapati takes the place of the Creator. He is the symbol of the unity of the universe. Both devas and *asuras*, demons, are children of Prajapati, who enters into the beings with name and form.¹⁹ Prajapati is *anirukta*, unuttered, and Brahman is what speech cannot express—*yad-vācānabhyuditam*.²⁰

We have noted that unity with all manifest creation was achieved by some seers through a personal God. In the Brahmanas it was through Prajapati. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* identifies Purusha with Prajapati. Through appropriate ritual, the sacrificer approaches the objects of worship—including Brahman—and unites with them, claims the *Shatapatha Brahmana* (11.4.4.2).

The creative principle personified by Prajapati in the Brahmanas is replaced by Brahman or Atman in the Upanishads. Heesterman observes: 'All things, entities, notions, powers, are connected with each other. ... In the course of this process the connection converged more and more and in the end, as is shown in the Upanishad texts, the intrinsic coherence of the universe was formulated in the ultimate connection *tat tvam asi*. In principle this identification of man with the cosmos is present in ritualistic thought.'²¹

The word *puruṣa* means man, person, the primordial Cosmic Being, and also the inner Spirit or Self. In the 'Purusha Sukta' of the Rig Veda, Purusha or Cosmic Being is the source of Creation; the body of Purusha is the material out of which the world is made. Purusha in the Samhitas has an anthropomorphic presentation and has created the universe by making a sacrifice of himself. This hymn gives an idea of Purusha's all-pervasiveness, which can be compared with that of Brahman in the Upanishads. Purusha is both immanent and transcendent: '*Sa bhūmim viśvato vṛtvā atyatiṣṭhat*; pervading the earth on every side, he transcends it.'²²

The Upanishads use the word *puruṣa* for the

inner Being: 'Anguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo jyotir-ivādhūmakah; Puruṣa, of the size of a thumb, is like light without smoke'²³; and also for the ultimate Reality: 'Puruṣān-na paraṁ kiñcit; there is nothing higher than Puruṣa' (1.3.11); and

*Divyo hy-amūrtaḥ puruṣaḥ
sa-bāhyābhyantaro hy-ajah;
Aprāno hy-amanāḥ śubbro
hy-akṣarāt-parataḥ parah.*

Puruṣa is self-luminous and formless, uncreated, and existing within and without. Devoid of vital force, devoid of mind, he is pure and higher than the supreme imperishable (maya).²⁴

The Vedic conception of divinity also goes beyond a personal God. The conception of *eko devaḥ*, which refers to God in masculine gender, has been discussed above. Beyond this level, beyond a personal god or goddess, we find the conception of *ekam sat*, 'one existence', in neuter gender: '*Ekam sad-viprā bahudhā vadanti*, the one Existence seers speak of in various ways'²⁵; or '*Suparṇam viprāḥ kavayo vacobhir-ekam santam bahudhā kalpayanti*; the wise seers, through their praise, make into many the fair-winged which is but one' (10.114.5). Reference to the transcendent nature of the Supreme Being is sometimes indicated by *tat*, 'That': '*Tad-id-āsa bhuvaneṣu jyeṣṭham*; That was the best in the worlds' (10.120.1). This 'That' has become everything: '*Tad-evāgnis-tad-ādityas-tad-vāyus-tad-ucandramāḥ*; That indeed is fire, That the sun, That the air, and That also the moon.'²⁶ In 'That' everything finds its one home:

*Venas-tat-pāśyan-nihitam guhā
sad-yatra viśvaṁ bhavaty-eka-nīdam;
Tasmīnn-idaṁ saṁ ca vi caiti sarvaṁ
sa otaḥ protaś-ca vibhūḥ prajāsu.*

The sage beholds that Being residing in the heart wherein all have found the one abode. In it all are united and from it all issue forth; all-pervading, it is the warp and woof of all.²⁷

The final Principle is called by no name, but is referred to as One, Something²⁸, beyond predica-

tion, and also 'no sat nāsat, neither existent nor non-existent', as we find in the famous 'Nasadiya Sukta'²⁹, a cosmogonic hymn which philosophically explains the origin of the universe as the evolution of the existent, *sat*, from the non-existent, *asat*. This hymn was once believed to have been 'the starting point of the natural philosophy which assumed shape in the evolutionary Sāṁkhya system'³⁰; but Gonda is most probably correct in observing that 'succinct and carefully worded, yet bold and poetical, it [Rig Veda (10.129)] heralds highly important and systematically elaborated ideas of the later periods. Tracing all things to one principle and declaring opposites such as day and night, death and continuance of life to be the self-unfoldment of this One it expresses the quintessence of monism.'³¹ In this hymn even the gods are placed posterior to Creation, so none of them can be the Creator; therefore, the Creator must be a higher principle.

Brahman, the Ultimate Reality

Atman or Brahman represents the highest principle in the Upanishads. The meanings of Atman include body, soul, the human being—mostly in the reflexive sense of one's own self—the essence or real nature of everything, and the principle of intrinsic unity underlying plurality. The Rig Veda speaks of the sun as the self of what moves and what stands still (1.115.1); and of Vata, wind, as the self of the gods (10.168.4). In the Atharva Veda (10.8.44), Atman appears as the self-existent, immortal Universal Soul, desireless, contented with the essence, lacking in nothing; knowing whom one does not fear death.³² The Atman is distinguished from the body³³; men versed in sacred knowledge know this Soul abiding in the body (10.2.31–2, 10.8.43). The all-pervasive nature of the Atman is mentioned in the *Shatapatha Brahmana* (4.2.2.1): '*Sarvaṁ hy-ayam-ātmā*; all is this Atman'. In the *Taittiriya Brahmana* (3.12.9), the Atman is Brahman, knowing which one is not bound by action. Only some people know the Atman: '*Ātmānam veda ayam-aham-asmīti*; knew the Atman as "I am this".³⁴ In the *Shatapatha Brahmana* (10.6.3) the 'final reality is summed up as the

self, made up of intelligence, with a body of spirit, a form of light, and of an ethereal nature, which pervades the regions and upholds the universe, though devoid of speech and mental affects.³⁵

Keith noted: 'If we accept, as we should, ... it seems natural to suppose that India developed the conception of a power common to various gods, just as there was admitted the unity of gods even by the time of certain Rigvedic hymns. This power, we may assume, was naturally denoted by the term Brahman' (446). In the Rig Veda the term 'Brahman' usually means mantra or prayer, but at the same time, Brahman is also the supreme abode of speech: *brahmāyaṃ vācaḥ paramaṃ vyoma*.³⁶ The philosophical hymns of the Atharva Veda have many references to Brahman—as the Creator, the womb of the existent and non-existent, the origin and the originated.³⁷ The Atharva Veda is called Brahma Veda, probably because it deals with Brahman more than the other Samhitas; the philosophy of Brahman—the Atman of the Upanishads—begins with this Veda. For instance, Brahman dwells in humans (10.7.17) and in gods (10.2.23), and creates the earth and atmosphere. These sections of the Atharva Veda have a resemblance to the poetic form of the concept of *brahma-vidyā*, knowledge of Brahman, as is presented in the Upanishads;³⁸ Brahman is everything:

*Tvaṃ strī tvaṃ pumān-asi
tvaṃ kumāra uta vā kumārī;
Tvaṃ jīrṇo daṇḍena vañcasi
tvaṃ jāto bhavasi viśvatomukhaḥ.*

You are the woman, you are the man, you are the boy, and you are the girl. You are the old man tottering with a stick; taking birth, you have your faces everywhere.³⁹

Not only is Brahman everything, everything is in Brahman: '*Antar-asminn-ime lokāḥ antar-viśvam-idaṃ jagat*; in it are these worlds, in it this entire world.'⁴⁰ The *Shatapatha Brahmana* (11.2.3.3) states that the self-existent Brahman descended into these worlds taking various names and forms, a well-known idea in Vedanta.

If the one Creator fashioned the universe like a master carpenter, where did the wood—the material—come from? '*Kim svid-vanaṃ ka u sa vṛkṣa āsa yato dyāvā-prthivī niṣṭataksu*; which was the forest, which the tree from which they fabricated heaven and earth?''⁴¹ The following is the reply: Brahman itself was the wood, the material cause: '*Brahma vanaṃ brahma sa vṛkṣa āsīt yato dyāvāprthivī niṣṭataksuḥ*; Brahman was the forest, Brahman the tree from which they fabricated heaven and earth.'⁴² This is exactly the position of the Vedanta philosophy, that Brahman is both the material and the efficient cause of the universe:

*Yathorna-nābhīḥ srjate grhṇate ca
yathā prthivyām-osaḍhayaḥ sambhavanti;
Yathā sataḥ puruṣāt keśalomāni
tathā'kṣarāt sambhavatiḥa viśvam.*

As a spider spreads out and withdraws (its thread), as on the earth grow the herbs, and as from a living person issue out hair, so out of the Imperishable does the universe emerge here.⁴³

This indicates that without any other help Brahman creates the universe, which is not really different from it, and also that Brahman is the material cause of this transient universe.


The Concept of Maya

How does then the One appear as many? The Vedantin replies: due to maya. '*Māyāṃ tu prakṛtiṃ vidyān-māyinaṃ ca maheśvaram*; know that Prakṛti is surely maya, and the Supreme Ishvara the lord of maya'⁴⁴; and maya is '*Devātmaśaktiṃ svaguṇair-nigūḍhām*, the intrinsic power of the Deity, hidden by its own effects' (1.3). Its function is to conceal Reality, to elude us. 'Maya' is a familiar word in the Samhitas and has several shades of meaning: art, wisdom, extraordinary or supernatural power, illusion, magic, unreal illusory image, illusory source of the visible universe, and more. Maya is *anirvacanīyā*, inexplicable; it is neither *sat*, existence, nor *asat*, non-existence. In the metaphorical expression of the poet-seers of the Rig Veda, the mystery that maya is appears as *nīhāra*, mist, that envelops

the Creator.⁴⁵ The Creator conceals himself and enters into beings: *prathamacchad-avarām ā viveśa*, (10.81.1).⁴⁶ The Rig Veda also says: '*Indro māyābhīḥ pururūpa īyate*, Indra moves in many forms by his maya' (6.47.18). The *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* (2.5.19) cites this mantra and comments:

*Ayam vai harayo'yaṁ vai daśa ca sahasrāṇi
bahūni cānantāni ca tad-etad-brahmāpūrvam-
anaparam-anantaram-abāhyam ayam-ātmā
brahma sarvānubhūr-ity-anuśāsanam.*

He is the organs; he is ten and thousands—many and infinite. That Brahman is without prior or posterior, without interior or exterior. This Self, the perceiver of everything, is Brahman. This is the teaching.

According to Vedānta, all happenings are nothing but maya. Interestingly, the battles fought by Indra are also called so: '*Māyet sā te yāni yuddhāny-āhur-nādyā śatrum nanu purā vivitse*; what are called your battles are illusory, you have no foe today, did you have one earlier? Certainly not.'⁴⁷ Not only the battles of Indra; Gaudapada tells us that every happening in the empirical world, viewed from the standpoint of the Absolute, is only maya: '*Māyāmātram-idaṁ dvaitam-advaitam paramārthataḥ*; all this duality, that is nothing but maya, is but non-duality in reality.'⁴⁸ This is quint-essential Advaita Vedānta. 

Notes and References

1. Sadananda Yogindra, *Vedānta-sara*, 1.3.
2. Arthur A Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), 184.
3. Rig Veda, 7.33.7.
4. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 4.3.6.
5. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.12.
6. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 2.17.
7. Yajur Veda, 23.47.
8. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.2.15; *Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.10.
9. Rig Veda, 8.48.3.
10. *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28.
11. '*Vedāham-etam puruṣam mahāntam-ādityavarṇam tamasaḥ parastāt*; I know this great Person, resplendent like the sun and beyond darkness', Yajur Veda, 31.18; *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 3.8.

12. Rig Veda, 2.1.3–7.
13. Also Atharva Veda, 3.13.4, 10.2.14.
14. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 6.11.
15. Rig Veda, 8.58.2.
16. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.2.12.
17. *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, 112.
18. Rig Veda, 10.81.3; also *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 3.3.
19. *Taittiriya Brahmana*, 2.2.7.1; a more explicit statement is available in *Shatapatha Brahmana*, 11.2.3.1–3.
20. *Kena Upanishad*, 1.5.
21. J C Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), 6.
22. Rig Veda, 10.90.1; also '*Tenedam pūrṇam puruṣeṇa sarvam*; by that Puruṣa is all this filled', *Mahānarayana Upanishad*, 12.13.
23. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.13.
24. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.1.2.
25. Rig Veda, 1.164.46.
26. Yajur Veda, 32.1; also *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 4.2.
27. Yajur Veda, 32.8; see also *Mahānarayana Upanishad*, 1.14.
28. '*Kim-api svid-ekam*', Rig Veda, 1.164.6.
29. Rig Veda, 10.129.
30. *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, 116.
31. Jan Gonda, *Vedic Literature* (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975), 136.
32. Also '*Anandam brahmaṇo vidvān na bibheti kutaścaneti*; the enlightened sage is not afraid of anything after realizing that bliss of Brahman', *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.9.
33. Atharva Veda, 5.1.7.
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35. A B Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), 467.
36. Rig Veda, 1.164.35.
37. Atharva Veda, 4.1, 5.6, 10.2.
38. See for example Atharva Veda, 8.9–10, 9.9–10, 10.2, 10.8, 11.7.
39. Atharva Veda, 10.8.27; also *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 4.3.
40. *Taittiriya Brahmana*, 2.8.8.9–10.
41. Rig Veda, 10.81.4.
42. *Taittiriya Brahmana*, 2.8.9.6–7.
43. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.1.7.
44. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 4.10.
45. Rig Veda, 10.82.7.
46. Also '*Pradhānajaiḥ svabhāvataḥ deva ekaḥ svam-āvṛnot*; the one Deity covered himself naturally with the effects of Prakṛiti', *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 6.10.
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Towards a Phenomenological Vedanta

Prof. J N Mohanty

ADVAITA VEDANTA—my discussion of Vedanta is exclusively limited to Advaita Vedanta—has had two sorts of grounding: one logical and the other phenomenological. A logical grounding would undertake a logical refutation of the category of ‘difference’—indeed of all conceptual thinking and of categories such as ‘relation,’ ‘substance and quality,’ and ‘cause and effect,’ which such thinking employs. By a logical refutation is meant a demonstration that these categories exhibit, upon questioning, logical fallacies such as *regressus ad infinitum* or *petitio principii*. For this kind of establishment of the sole reality of the difference-less and indeterminate Brahman, we have to look into Nagarjuna as a predecessor or, amongst Advaitins, to Sri Harsha’s *Khandana-khanda-khadya*. But this variety of logical grounding for the unreality of the empirical world arises later in time than Acharya Shankara’s exposition of Advaita. The primary support that Shankara takes recourse to is the interpretation of the Shruti, which—given that the Shruti is stronger than any other *pramāṇa*, means of certain knowledge—is no less strong than a mere logical grounding. Shankara himself advances a famous critique of mere rational argumentation and I will not here recall his beautiful and remarkable text. Logic itself, as Heidegger insisted in his early writings, without any grounding, is ‘homeless’ and cannot legislate as to what is or is not real. Shruti, beginningless tradition, in this regard is stronger, and a correct hermeneutic of it is an appropriate philosophical grounding.

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By a phenomenological Vedanta I mean neither this hermeneutic of Shruti nor that dialectical logical establishment, but a Vedanta—the original Vedanta in my view—that is solidly grounded in experience. The Upanishads abound in this sort of grounding. I would specially refer to the texts in which the aspirant is led step by step by the instructor along the different states of the self—waking, dream, and dreamless sleep—and is given a demonstration that, as one proceeds along this path, consciousness is stripped of its empirical contents and gradually approximates to the ideal of the pure Self. I need not explain here these well-known texts. What I want to emphasize is that these texts establish the freedom of the Self from all worldly constraints by showing how, step by step, one reaches the goal. There are many hurdles along the way, difficulties to be overcome, and experiences to be focused upon steadfastly and one-pointedly.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a descriptive study of one’s experience and what is given in it precisely as it is given. Going beyond the discussion of the four states of consciousness, and being based in later Advaita writers such as Padmapada, I would like to draw attention to the commonly experienced fact that ‘I am ignorant,’ or, in the state of deep sleep, ‘I did not know anything.’ Here, one is directly aware of one’s not knowing something. The Advaitin focuses upon this awareness and what it implies. First of all, the direct awareness that ‘I am ignorant’ implies that this ignorance, of which I am aware, cannot be a mere absence of knowledge; for were it so, this perception of an absence would demand a knowledge of that which was absent—in this case

the knowledge that I lack—but knowing this knowledge would amount to not being ignorant. What I am aware of, in that case, must be positive ignorance, or ignorance as a positive entity, *bhāvarūpa*, which conceals the object I do not know. And my direct awareness of this entity cannot be a sensory perception; it must be an immediate awareness which is there in all knowledge that takes place via a mental mode, *vr̥tti*. I could not be ever ignorant of my ignorance, for then there would be infinite regress. The awareness that ‘I am ignorant’ must be a ‘witness-perception’, *sākṣi-pratyakṣa*, not mediated by a mental mode.

In addition, knowledge of an object must be accompanied by an awareness that, prior to this knowledge, I was ignorant of that object; and also the awareness that if I know the object from this current perspective, the front side for example, I do not see it from the other side, the back side. Thus, knowledge and ignorance are intimately implicated. Every object, whatsoever it be, is an object either of knowledge or of ignorance; and these two being modes of consciousness, every object, as the *Panchapadika* puts it, is an object of consciousness either as known or as unknown. The Vedantic idealism has no better formulation.

Bhattacharya and Husserl

Let me quickly refer to two phenomenological accesses to Vedanta. One is the thought of the great contemporary Indian philosopher K C Bhattacharya, and the other is the German philosopher Husserl’s methodical access to what he calls ‘transcendental phenomenology’.

The basic question for both is how to escape from the clutches of an empirical perception of the world and reach a knowledge of the self in its purity. For K C Bhattacharya it becomes a search for freedom, and so also for Husserl, though for the latter only the self as constituting the world is truly free. Both pursue the pure self only step by step.

For Bhattacharya, empirical being-in-the-world is consciousness *of* an object. It is intentional. But he construes intentionality not as attachment to

the world, but as implying an awareness of a dissociation from the object and, at the same time, the awareness that consciousness is *not* the object. Thus, even in the most pervasive orientation of empirical consciousness there is a hint of the subject’s freedom from its object. This incipient sense of freedom is further developed, in Bhattacharya’s account, in the experience of ‘my body’—not of the body as a thing, but of the felt body. This ‘lived body’, as Husserl calls it, is the subject’s functioning as the zero point around which the objects in the world find their positions—‘for’, ‘near’, ‘in front of’, ‘to the right of’, and so on—but the body as lived is not experienced as a thing occupying a spatial position. The body-subject is immediately experienced *as free*—free in initiating its own movement and free to direct itself to one object rather than to another. The next step in the experience of freedom is the experience of error and the illusory objects it produces, and then in the psychic fact objectified in introspection. At the end of Bhattacharya’s route is spiritual introspection into subjectivity as pure freedom.

There are gaps in this hastily recalled story, briefly outlined in Bhattacharya’s *The Subject as Freedom*—possibly the most important philosophical work of the last hundred years in India. He takes us from one stage of consciousness to another, in a series of developing experiences of freedom. Husserl, by contrast, places at the beginning a methodological decision to exercise a ‘bracketing’ or epoché, whereby consciousness is progressively freed from mundane presuppositions.

Thus, the naive judgement ‘That rose is red’ is transformed into ‘I see that the rose is red’, and this into ‘I see (that the rose is red)’. The consciousness of seeing has now a content which is placed within brackets. The object, instead of being in the world as it originally is in the first two statements, is now a structural component of the consciousness, its content in the third statement. Proceeding in this manner, he hopes to be able to show that the world is but a content of consciousness and has no being apart from the being of consciousness.

The next step in Husserlian thinking is to show that consciousness is intrinsically meaning-giving: the world derives its significance, and things in the world their meaning, from consciousness. In this sense, consciousness *constitutes* the world. The world is constituted in consciousness. As a constituting entity, consciousness is transcendental; its mundanity is only a misleading self-understanding.

There is still a gap between this last position and the Vedantic thesis that the world is false. For bridging this gulf, we need an accurate understanding of the nature of ‘falsity’, *mithyātva*.

The Nature of Mithyātva

When we read Vedantic works today and are told that the world is *mithyā*, we conjure up the picture of a rope appearing as a snake. After correction, the snake disappears. Does the world disappear after the knowledge of Brahman? The magician produces a magic show using tricks into which we, the spectators, cannot see. Does Brahman produce the world-show likewise by a trick, the power of producing it out of nothing?

It is obvious that these pictures do not fit. Phenomenological Vedānta would not have anything to do with them, except as a preliminary—and only as a preliminary—mode of clarification. There is one dominating mistake we should be aware of, and this lies in the English translation, or in that of any modern Western language, of *mithyā*. In Advaita, be it remembered, *mithyā* is a technical term defined as, amongst many other things, ‘*pratipanna upādhau traikālika niṣedha pratiyogitvam*’; the counter-entity of absolute negation in the very substratum where it is cognized’ or, more importantly, ‘*sad-asadbhāyam anirvacanīyatvam*’; defying predication as “existent” or “non-existent”. Incidentally, these are definitions of *mithyātva*, the property of being *mithyā*. The world is experienced, everything in it is an object of consciousness. From the point of view of metaphysics, it is neither *sat*, existent or real, nor *asat*, non-existent or unreal. Its negation is of a very peculiar sort. ‘This world is not’

is a possible judgement, but that does not mean that, were it the case, the world-appearance would vanish into nothingness. As an appearance, that is neither real nor unreal, it will be there.

Therefore, what does it mean to say that the appearance is *mithyā* and that it is falsely superimposed on reality owing to *avidyā*, ignorance? I understand here by *adhyāsa*, superimposition, what in phenomenology is called ‘constitution’. The process of constitution lies anonymously buried under the way a constituted entity is given to begin with. Phenomenology aims at recovering this anonymous process by reflection. Consciousness, as the constituting process, has to be uncovered. The finished product, the thing given, has to be seen as constituted. But Husserl was prompt in recognizing that this process is beginningless: every constitution builds upon earlier accomplishments. We cannot go back to the beginning. The same with *avidyā*. It is *anādi*, beginningless, but *sānta*, with a definite end.

Let me briefly recall the position of *avidyā*, following as I do the Vivarana school. Pure Consciousness is both the *āśraya*, locus, and *viśaya*, object, of *avidyā*. *Avidyā*, in the language of this school, seeks to conceal precisely that on which it rests. But the concealment is never total, for were it so there would result ‘darkness of the universe’, nothing would be experienced. *Avidyā* conceals Brahman, but at the same time, in that very act of concealment, stands manifested in the experience ‘I am ignorant’. Both consciousness and *avidyā* are mutually implicated. We start from this middle ground. The wise man alone reaches the ‘origin’.

Let us get rid of the myth that Brahman completely transcends the world. If it did, there would be no world-consciousness, *jagad-āndhya-prasangāt*. Recall the Advaitic statement to the effect that wherever something appears, *bhāti*, something exists, *asti*, and something pleases, *prīṇāti*. This appearing or manifestation, existence, and bliss is nothing other than Brahman; only Brahman, to be sure, as limited by the particular content which appears, exists, and pleases.

(Continued on page 57)

Preparation and Practice



IMAGE: 'TREE', PAUL STEVENSON / FLICKR

Aspiration

Swami Muktidananda

SPIRITUAL ASPIRATION signifies a desire to seek God or the truth about oneself. It is the yearning of the soul for the supreme Spirit. It is a genuine ardour for liberation from the bondage of death-bound transitory existence. Spiritual aspiration is the central propelling force in religious and spiritual life and alone leads the human mind towards the experience of the Divine. It can also be described as a struggle to raise one's consciousness, to connect and be in communion with the Spirit, to reach greater heights of personal spiritual progress and evolution. It is essentially a pure and positive emotional fervour, born out of the faculty of discernment, *viveka*, and detachment, *vairāgya*—and it is yearning for God that makes religion meaningful.

In Vedantic parlance spiritual aspiration is termed *mumukṣutva*. The *mumukṣutva* mentioned in the Vedānta literature, the *viraha* that we find in bhakti literature, the divine discontent mentioned in Christian spiritual literature, and the *vyākulatā* that we come across in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and other saints—all indicate different shades of expression of spiritual aspiration. Aspiration, indeed, is the cry of the inner soul, the *jīvātman*, for the experience of the supreme Spirit, Paramatman. The prayerful expression in one of the famous mantras of the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* indicates the intensity of aspiration of the seeker appealing to the Almighty: '*Asato mā sad-gamaya tamaso mā jyotir-gamaya mṛtyor-mā-amṛtaṁ gamaya*'; lead me [O Lord] from untruth to truth, from darkness to light,

from mortality to immortality.¹ We find another fervent prayer in the *Isha Upanishad*: '*Tat-tvaṁ pūṣannapāvṛṇu satya-dharmāya dṛṣṭaye*'; O Sun [supreme Spirit], please remove that [veil of ignorance] so that I, who am righteous, can experience the Truth.² Vedāntic literature and other scriptures, throughout, are replete with such impassioned petitions expressing the aspirations of seekers.

Psychology of Spiritual Aspiration

To get a clear understanding of the functional aspect of spiritual aspiration, it is necessary to study the subtle psychological processes involved in the various modes of its manifestation. Aspiration essentially creates a positive emotional field in the mind which directs the will to seek God. It is this refined spiritual emotion that has the power to activate higher spiritual brain centres and create spiritual samskaras. Simultaneously, it also modulates and deactivates the lower brain centres where the samskaras, the seeds of impressions of past actions responsible for worldly tendencies, reside. Normally, our mind creates repetitive patterns of thoughts resulting in endless mental gyration. Aspiration takes the mind out of this whirlpool of replicating mechanical thought currents and thus frees it from the grip of past memories. It is this uplifting power of aspiration that enables us to raise the mind to a higher level—of divine consciousness—just as an aircraft, when taking off from the ground into space, works against the tremendous gravitational pull to keep itself afloat and soar higher. The yearning for God thus conserves and reorganizes the mental energies and gives them a higher focus making the mind pure and luminous, creating in turn favourable conditions for spiritual experiences.

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It is worth recalling what Sri Aurobindo says about the nature of aspiration—its motivating influence on the mind and its importance in sadhana. He observes: ‘It is this zeal for the Lord, *utsāha*, the zeal of the whole nature for its divine results, *vyākulatā*, the heart’s eagerness for the attainment of the Divine—that devours the ego and breaks up the limitations ... for the full and wide reception of that which it seeks.’³ According to Sri Aurobindo, transformation and experience can come only by sustaining the intensity of aspiration during the course of sadhana. Therefore he says: ‘Intensity of the aspiration brings the intensity of the experience and by repeated intensity for the experience, the change.’⁴ Therefore, aspiration is the key to spiritual transformation.

Aspiration is a state of higher awareness in which we are striving constantly to relate our ‘I’ sense, our ego, to God, in order to discover the truth about its existence. Since we normally relate and identify our individuality very strongly with the outer personality—the lower self consisting of body, mind, and activity—our relationship with God is unconscious and very feeble. As we intensify our sadhana and longing for God, our relationship with God gets stronger, brighter, and deeper, creating an emotional field in the mind and heart called bhakti. This pure emotion in our heart blossoms as spiritual fervour and the mind gets suffused with yearning for God, *bhāva-vṛtti*. In the state of continual aspiration, ego, intellect, emotion, and will turn towards God. Thus the process of transformation sets in.

Sri Ramakrishna’s Vyākulatā Yoga

Sri Ramakrishna was the very embodiment of aspiration. He had the vision of the Divine Mother by dint of sheer aspiration. Aspiration, which he termed *vyākulatā*, is the dominant note of his sadhana. It is the simplest form of sadhana that anyone can practise. By employing this sadhana of continual prayer with intense yearning, he revealed a spiritual path which is at once simple, easy, and accessible to all types of seekers. He observes: ‘Cry to

the Lord with an intensely yearning heart and you will certainly see Him.’⁵ Regarding the significance of aspiration he used to enlighten devotees in this way: ‘Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God’ (ibid.).

This aspiration is not an abstract power or idea. It is a concrete, inner feeling of the heart which expresses itself in the course of seeking and sadhana as continuous prayer to the Supreme Being. According to Sri Ramakrishna, if prayer is sufficiently intense and one-pointed, it leads to the absorption of the mind and brings about the union of the soul with the Supreme Spirit. Thus, prayer itself is a kind of yoga sadhana which can be termed *prārthanā yoga* or *vyākulatā yoga*. The lives of Sri Ramakrishna and many other saints, such as Bhakta Kanakadasa and Mira Bai, are outstanding examples reflecting the power of prayer.

It is the power of this yearning for God that makes a seeker follow spiritual disciplines like *yama* and *niyama*. In the case of a Vedantin, it is *mumukṣutva* which compels a sadhaka to practise the six spiritual virtues, *śama-damādi ṣaṭ-sampatti*. Steady aspiration gives the soul strength to manage the ups and downs of spiritual practice. In order to understand and check our sincerity and intensity, now and then a seeker needs to ask: ‘What do I actually want in life? Do I want anything apart from God?’ When the mind is questioned by such enquiry, the discerning faculty is activated and aspiration begins to manifest as a result. The power of aspiration is so potent that it can transform an ordinary religious person with desires, *arthārthin*, into a seeker, *jijñāsu*, and then into an enlightened being, *jñānin*. A worldly person is thus transformed into a seeker of God and then into a man of knowledge and experience. The exalted lives of saints like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Tukaram, Bhadrachala Ramadasu, as well as of such devotees as Girishchandra Ghosh, are some of the classic examples that clearly indicate the peak of aspiration to which the human mind can be lifted.

It is longing for God that expresses itself as the different modes of spiritual practice—such as prayer, worship, and japa—that culminate in meditation. Aspiration is like a live wire carrying electricity, connecting and powering sadhana at different stages of spiritual life. Any spiritual practice devoid of spiritual fervour tends to become mechanical and ineffective.

When longing for the vision of God reaches its peak, the aspiring soul expects God every next moment, and struggles to see him in every event and in every form. As the aspirant tries to discover the divine connectivity and divine will in everything around, anything bereft of and unconnected with God appears meaningless. The aspirant's sincerity in seeking God, which was initially limited, tends to pervade his or her whole mind, resulting in total sincerity. This state is explained in the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* as follows: '*Tad-arpitākṣhilācārātā tad-vismaraṇe parama-vyākulātā iti*; [an aspirant] surrenders everything to the Lord and experiences extreme anguish in the event of forgetting him [even for a moment].'⁶ This incessant seeking eventually purifies the heart and transforms the whole mind.

Aspiration and Grace

The emotional field generated by the longing for God first grips and attenuates the worldly samskaras; its positive effect is that it then activates the spiritual samskaras. In fact, as mentioned in the *Patanjali Yoga Sutra*, as the sadhaka progresses on the spiritual path, the fire of spiritual experiences, *prasaṅkhyānāgni*, tends to burn the worldly samskaras and transform them into burnt seeds, *dagdhabījā*, which are unable to sprout. Aspiration, here, is the fuel that facilitates this process of burning the samskaras born of ignorance, which then leads to purification and sublimation.

As such, spiritual experience cannot be created by human will, emotion, or intelligence; it cannot be gained even by the efforts of the ego. It can be had only by creating conducive internal conditions, by intense aspiration for the descent

of divine grace. In his book *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle, says: 'The initiation of the awakening process is an act of grace. You cannot make it happen nor can you prepare yourself for it or accumulate credits towards it. There isn't a tidy sequence of logical steps that leads towards it, although the mind would love that.'⁷

Therefore, those moments we seek only God are fruitful and blessed. The *Avadhuta Gita*, in its very opening stanza, says: '*Īśvarānugrahād-eva puṁsām advaita-vāsanā*; human beings have aspiration to know the ultimate non-dual Reality only by the grace of Almighty God.' So we human beings can only seek God and knock at the door of the Divine and wait, but cannot create spiritual experiences. It is only the divine grace which descends in response to our longing that can really transform and awaken our minds and give us the necessary spiritual experiences. These experiences may be of different types at different levels. The nature of spiritual experiences is governed by the divine will. In this context we can recall the observations of one of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples, Swami Brahmananda, about the hidden spiritual mind which exists in us in bud form. It opens up and blossoms as our longing for God increases and spiritual practice deepens, and thus we become eligible for spiritual experiences. It is through this higher spiritual mind that one gets varieties of spiritual experiences.

Mumukṣutva in Vedānta Sadhana

One who longs to get liberated from worldly bondage is called a *mumukṣu*. The aspiration to experience the supreme Truth in the objective realm that we see in the path of bhakti takes an inward turn towards the subjective pole of existence, and even beyond, in Vedānta sadhana. Here, the search is to find the Atman—the eternal core of our personality and the real basis of our identity—and its relation to Brahman, the divine Principle, the supreme Reality. According to Shankaracharya, as mentioned in his *Vivekachudamani*, a *mumukṣu* should be intelligent and

learned, with great power of comprehension, and be able to overcome doubts by his reasoning; he should have discernment, should not crave for worldly enjoyments, and should also possess tranquillity and the allied virtues.⁸

Jnana marga, the path of knowledge, is predominantly based on reason and enquiry. It specifically deals with the exploration of truth about the nature of 'I' and the basis of 'I-consciousness'—*Ko'ham?* Who am I?—as practised and preached by Sri Ramana Maharshi, a great saint of modern India.

The fourfold discipline, *sādhana-catustaya*, comprising discernment, *viveka*, detachment, *vairāgya*, the six spiritual virtues, *ṣaṭ-sampatti*, and *mumukṣutva*, longing for moksha, are the primary and practical aspects of Vedanta sadhana. But it is possible to practise the six virtues, like the restraint of external sense organs and the mind, only by first having *mumukṣutva*. It is the intensity of the yearning for liberation of the *mumukṣu*, the longing aspirant, that makes sadhana a smooth going and takes the aspirant faster towards the goal. The popular Vedantic text *Vedānta-sāra* describes the *mumukṣu* graphically as *dīpta-śirā jala-rāsim-iva*, like one with head on fire running towards a lake to extinguish it.⁹ Similarly, a *mumukṣu* with burning aspiration for liberation runs towards the supreme Self. Hence, in Vedanta sadhana, burning aspiration is an indispensable need.

We normally live in a state of ignorance. Every ordinary thought or feeling which connects us to different happenings, events, and persons keeps us continuously in ignorance. The world-related mental realm in which we usually live veils the Truth from us and binds us perpetually to the ever-changing objective world. We need to go in the reverse direction—towards the subject from the objective world, towards inner silence from the outer noise, and then into divine consciousness from worldly consciousness. How do we break away from this continuous outward thought current which keeps us in ignorance? It is the power of *mumukṣutva*, provided it is sufficiently strong

and continuous, that releases the mind from attachment to the world, the bondage of past memories, and the limitations of the ego. Therefore, for those who have taken up Vedanta sadhana, spiritual preceptors have the following advice:

*Āsupter-āmṛteḥ kālāṁ nayed vedānta-cintayā;
Dadyān-nāvasaram kiñcit kāmādīnāṁ manāgapi.*

Without giving any time to desires and related objects, until you go to sleep or until death overtakes you, spend all your time in the contemplation of the object of Vedanta (the supreme Reality).

When Shankaracharya says '*mokṣa-kāraṇa-sāmagryāṁ bhaktir-eva garīyasī*; among things conducive to liberation, bhakti alone holds the supreme place', he perhaps implies the role of emotion involved in aspiration for liberation and Self-realization by his use of the word 'bhakti'.¹⁰ Even though bhakti is specifically interpreted as *svasvarūpa anusandhāna*, seeking after one's real nature, in the very next line of the text, the power of emotion—bhakti, which is one of the important faculties of the mind—also has to be channelled and transformed throughout sadhana to keep *mumukṣutva* alive. Hence, along with reason, some refined form of bhakti is very much needed. That is why we see the expression of unusual guru bhakti in sages who have followed the path of jnana.

What sustains *mumukṣutva* or spiritual aspiration? In Vedanta sadhana, it is *viveka*, supported by *vairāgya* towards the world, that kindles *mumukṣutva*. The will to seek God receives further strength when the intellect understands the evanescence of the world and looks beyond to experience that which is eternal. The emotional drive that aspiration generates thus gives the seeker will-power to reject the visible known world and seek the invisible unknown Divine. Finally, it is this continual force of emotion in the form of aspiration to experience one's higher Self that powers and sustains sadhana.


In the path of devotion it is restlessness for attaining God that gives one strength to conquer

obstacles. Spiritual life is a hurdle race. Unmindful of the difficulties, a true spiritual aspirant continues his journey facing a series of blockades, and to such sincere aspirants God bestows a special power called *manyu*, ardour, to overcome these hurdles. We can clearly see this in the lives of saints like Bhakta Kanakadasa and Surdas, who were beset with innumerable trials and tribulations. Sustaining aspiration is a challenging task in our spiritual life and this determines our spiritual progress. It also gives us the unique ability to convert our duties in life and all types of work into sadhana—a forward movement towards the goal by relating it to God and to his will. It is by constant prayer, *satsanga*, the company of those who yearn for God, *svādhya*, study and japa, and also through discernment and avoidance of wrong company that we can make aspiration smoulder continually in the different layers of our mind.

A True Basis for the Harmony of Religions

Aspiration makes our life truly goal-oriented. It improves the quality of religious life, taking it to a higher level and making it effective. Aspiration is the springboard which instils all the essential spiritual virtues.


In the vast world of religion and spirituality true aspiration alone makes religious and spiritual life purposeful and fruitful. Therefore, in the history of religion and philosophy, and in the lives of saints, spiritual aspiration is the core and also the dynamic power guiding the practical search for truth. This represents the evolving religion and the spiritually progressive human mind that strives to seek the supreme Reality, the eternal Godhead. It is the aspiring spirit of humankind and actual spiritual practice which make the ultimate goal of all religions more or less common, experiential, and true. It is through these core spiritual aspects that we find the common base of all religions, and not through their varied external cultural attires. This defines the role of religion in human life and thus makes the goal of religion clear. In spiritual aspiration all the true religions converge, enabling us to

discover the integral truth. Sri Ramakrishna practised a series of sadhanas, as prescribed by various paths of Hinduism and other religions, with an insatiable hunger to experience God in different manifestations. This is a clear testimony to the Vedic dictum '*Ekam sad-viprā bahudhā vadanti*; Truth is one but sages call it by different names.'¹¹ Therefore, only when the human heart and mind are kindled by the aspiration to experience God is it possible to truly practise the harmony of religions and unite humanity. 

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5. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 83.
6. *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, 19.
7. Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* (New York: Dutton, 2005), 259.
8. Shankaracharya, *Vivekachudamani*, 16–17.
9. Sadananda Yogindra, *Vedanta-sara*, 30.
10. *Vivekachudamani*, 31.
11. *Rig Veda*, 1.164.46.

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The task of phenomenological Vedanta is to start with ordinary experience, with my consciousness of worldly things, and from this lowest level find a pathway to the pure infinite Consciousness which is the Reality par excellence. It would not do to tell the inquisitive that only in *turiya*, the transcendental fourth state, one experiences Brahman. One needs to be led, in thinking, step by step along a path marked by a gradual freedom of consciousness from the world so that the goal increasingly makes more sense. My belief is that classical Vedanta, especially the Vivarana school, has elements which can be used for this purpose. In this paper, I have just hinted at such a possibility. 

Shraddha

Swami Utsargananda

‘**Ā**DAU ŚRADDHĀ; in the beginning shraddha.’¹ Sri Rupa Goswami, while explaining the necessary steps for attaining the love of Sri Krishna, states that first of all comes shraddha. Then, out of shraddha, come all the spiritual virtues that ultimately lead to the highest realization. Therefore, to start the spiritual life one should have shraddha. It is a fundamental attitude not only for treading the spiritual path but also for achieving success in any enterprise. All prophets, whether of Hinduism or of any other religion, have stressed shraddha in one way or other. They have asked us to develop shraddha in the scriptures, or in the teachers, or in the divine principle residing in everybody’s heart. But no prophet avoided shraddha altogether.

Development of the Concept of Shraddha

‘Etymologically, the word *śraddhā* is derived from *śrat*, a root noun probably cognate with the English word ‘heart’, and *dhā* to place; it would thus mean: “to put one’s heart on something.”² Though generally the English word ‘faith’ is used to translate ‘shraddha’, it does not convey the same meaning. Explaining the uniqueness of this word, Swami Vivekananda says: ‘I would not translate this word Shraddha to you, it would be a mistake; it is a wonderful word to understand, and much depends on it.’³

In the Rig Veda we come across the ‘Shraddha Sukta’.⁴ Its seer is a woman whose name is also Shraddha. Here shraddha is deified and conceived of as a deity who is to be worshipped thrice a day. The hymn states that shraddha is to be attained through heartfelt devotion, and that by this shraddha

everything can be achieved.

In the Brahmanas, shraddha signifies ‘the aspiration for the sacrificial goal—namely, *svarga*, heaven—and a confidence in the efficacy of the sacrifice to achieve it; it also implies trust in the priests who officiate at the sacrifice. It is predominantly magical, ritualistic and formal.’⁵

‘The concept of *śraddhā* in the “earlier” Upanishads manifests the following tendencies and implications: i) it is an aspiration for the knowledge and realization of Brahman; ii) it is a confidence in *brahmacarya*, *upāsana*, etc., as appropriate means to Brahman; iii) it is predominantly intellectual; iv) it is subjective and psychological’ (77).

In Upanishads such as *Katha*, *Mundaka*, *Shvetashvatara*, *Isha*, and *Maitri* we find that tapas is increasingly important and even one of the dominant elements in the concept of shraddha. ‘*Śraddhā* in the “later Upanishads” while continuing to express mystical, intellectual and eschatological implications, at the same time, reveals realistic, dualistic and theistic tendencies’ (123).

‘*Śraddhā* in the *Bhagavadgītā* implies: i) duality between the worshipper and the worshipped; ii) the utter transcendence of God; iii) the incarnation inspiring personal trust and love; iv) the utter humility of the devotee and his total surrender to Him trusting that He is not only the goal but also the way; v) a moral relationship as of a person to a person, a finite person to Infinite Person; vi) negatively, it precludes insincerity, ill-will and the desire for worldly, narrow or selfish goals’ (175).

Yaskacharya comments: ‘*Śrat satyam-asyāṁdhīyata iti*; *śrat* means that which bears truth’⁶. In other words, shraddha is an attitude having truth as its base.

Shankaracharya defines shraddha in three ways:

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(i) *Śraddhā hiranyagarbhādi-viśayā vidyā*; shraddha is meditation on Hiranyagarbha and others.⁷

(ii) *Śraddhā yat-pūrvakāḥ sarva-puruṣārtha-sādhana-prayogaś-citta-prasāda āstikya-buddhiḥ*; shraddha is mental tranquillity and belief in the truth of things (taught by the scriptures and the teacher), which is a precondition for the application of the means that are productive of human objectives.⁸

(iii) *Śāstrasya guru-vākyaśya satya-buddhyāvadhāraṇam / Sā śraddhā kathitā sadbhīr-jayā vastūpalabhyate*; acceptance by firm judgement as true what the scriptures and the guru instruct, is called by sages shraddha or faith, by means of which the Reality is perceived.⁹

Vyasa defines shraddha as '*cetasāḥ samprasādaḥ*; clarity and tranquillity of mind'.¹⁰

Swami Vivekananda has stressed shraddha as faith in one's own strength, faith in the divinity of one's own self.¹¹

To sum up, we can affirm that shraddha is self-confidence arising out of faith in one's own divinity. It is uncommon strength that overcomes mountain-high difficulties in no time and with little effort—a strength gained by the palpable feeling of God's presence and grace, which translates in total surrender to him. Shraddha is the childlike faith of a devotee who tells that through God's grace, which can subdue the inscrutable maya, this ocean of worldliness can be crossed over. It is faith beyond doubt in the teachings of the guru and the scriptures. It is the perfect and wholesome understanding of an ideal which makes the whole personality goal-oriented for ever and the mind steady, one-pointed, even amid temptations. Shraddha is that which makes spiritual practice the second nature of the seeker. It is that infinite patience which gives endurance to wait for years, lives even, without break—a process that helps to perfect the means, however minor they be, for the attainment of the goal. Shraddha is the lamp of hope ever burning, even when there are no signs of victory.

As we see the development of the concept of shraddha in the Vedic and post-Vedic periods and

as we go through some of its definitions, we can conclude that shraddha is a unique conation experienced by those who succeed in spiritual life.

The Ideal of Shraddha

Any ideal, whether secular or transcendental, cannot be properly grasped in the earlier stages of our effort to attain it. Unless there is some idea about the ideal, all efforts to achieve it are futile. Therefore, before progressing in any path it is necessary to gather some idea about the ideal. For this there are two sources: persons who have realized the ideal and the records left by them. In the spiritual world those records became the vast mass of scriptures and their subsidiaries.

Regarding access to those records, Acharya Shankara advises against seeking the knowledge of Brahman independently, even if one is versed in the scriptures.¹² Everyone understands the scriptures in one's own way, and such understanding does not always lead to realization—this is Shankara's note of caution. Scriptures should be approached in the light of the explanations given by seers. Only the reasoning that is in accordance with Shruti should be followed.¹³ And since this is not easy to fulfil, a qualified guru on whom a seeker can depend becomes essential. When one has full faith in such a teacher, then alone does one realize the ideal. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* states: '*Ācāryavān-puruṣo veda*; one who has a teacher knows the Reality'.¹⁴

In the same Upanishad we find Uddalaka, a fully qualified guru, instructing Shvetaketu, a seeker of Truth, in various ways; but Shvetaketu fails to understand the teachings. Then Uddalaka says, '*Śraddhatsva somyeti*; O noble one [Shvetaketu], have shraddha' (6.12.1). Commenting on this, Acharya Shankara says: 'Though the subject has been established by means of arguments and valid authorities, still people's minds being entirely taken up with gross external objects, any clear conception of subtle ultimate truths is almost impossible without proper faith. ... When there is faith, the mind can be easily concentrated on the subject to be understood; and then the understanding quickly follows'.¹⁵ Thus we

see that shraddha in Vedantic truths as taught by the great teachers is the way to clear understanding.

The importance of firm shraddha in spiritual life cannot be overemphasized. While explaining the necessity of shraddha at the beginning of one's spiritual life, Swami Brahmananda remarked: 'At first the sadhaka has to pin his faith—it may be "blind faith"—to the precepts of his guru or of some great soul, then only can he advance towards the goal.'¹⁶ To make devotees understand the value of shraddha, Sri Ramakrishna says:

One must have childlike faith—and the intense yearning that a child feels to see its mother. ... Let me tell you the story of a boy named Jatila. He used to walk to school through the woods, and the journey frightened him. One day he told his mother of his fear. She replied: 'Why should you be afraid? Call Madhusudan.' 'Mother,' asked the boy, 'who is Madhusudan?' The mother said, 'He is your Elder Brother.' One day after this, when the boy again felt afraid in the woods, he cried out, 'O Brother Madhusudan!' But there was no response. He began to weep aloud: 'Where are You, Brother Madhusudan? Come to me. I am afraid.' Then God could no longer stay away. He appeared before the boy and said: 'Here I am. Why are you frightened?' And so saying He took the boy out of the woods and showed him the way to school. When he took leave of the boy, God said: 'I will come whenever you call Me. Do not be afraid.' One must have this faith of a child, this yearning.¹⁷

On another occasion, while talking to the Divine Mother in an ecstatic mood, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Mother, one needs faith. Away with this wretched reasoning! Let it be blighted! One needs faith—faith in the words of the guru, childlike faith' (381).

Understanding the efficacy of shraddha, Swami Vivekananda explains: 'To preach the doctrine of Shraddha or genuine faith is the mission of my life. Let me repeat to you that this faith is one of the potent factors of humanity and all religions. First have faith in yourselves. ... If that faith comes to us, it will bring back our national life as it was in the

days of Vyasa and Arjuna—the days when all our sublime doctrines of humanity were preached.'¹⁸ 'The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. ... Faith in ourselves will do everything. I have experienced it in my own life, and am still doing so; and as I grow older that faith is becoming stronger and stronger' (2.301).

In fact, it is virtually impossible to stay on the right path without faith. For until we have the actual experience of God ourselves we have nothing but faith to sustain us. But notice, this faith is not 'blind' ... If we but nourish that faith enough, strengthen it, brood upon it, meditate upon it day after day, year after year, one day it will blossom into our own divine realization within. This is the true meaning of the repetition of God's holy name, the sacred mantra; it is the careful nursing of our faith in God and in the seer of God, which then becomes, with more and more brooding upon it, the faith in the possibility that we ourselves could see God, which then becomes our very own actual seeing of God.¹⁹

Types of Shraddha

In the Bhagavadgita one whole chapter—the seventeenth—is dedicated to expounding the types of shraddha and their implications. It starts with Arjuna's question to Sri Krishna about the faith of those who, without following scriptural injunctions, offer sacrifices with faith. What is the nature of their faith? Is it sattvic, rajasic, or tamasic? Sri Krishna answers:

*Trividhā bhavati śraddhā dehinām sā svabhāvajā;
Sāttvikī rājasī caiva tāmasī ceti tām śṛṇu.*

The shraddha of the embodied beings, born of their own nature, is threefold—born of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Hear about it.

*Sattvānurūpā sarvasya śraddhā bhavati bhārata;
Śraddhāmāyo'yaṁ puruṣo yo yacchraddhaḥ sa eva saḥ.*

O scion of the Bharata dynasty, the faith of all beings is in accordance with their minds. This person is made up of faith as the dominant factor. He is verily what his shraddha is.²⁰

A person's shraddha is in accordance with his or her temperament; one is verily what one's shraddha is!

The rest of the chapter explains the functions of these three types of shraddha:

The *Śraddhā* of embodied beings is three-fold. It is born of individual *svabhāva* or the latent disposition of man; it is not imposed from outside. It is produced by the tendencies (*saṁskāras*) that are the result of his actions in previous life or lives. Under the influence of these tendencies the individual is dominated by one or the other of the *guṇas* of *prakṛti*. Thus, according to the respective individual qualities, *śraddhā* is either *sāttvikī*, *rājasī* or *tāmasī*. And the actions of individuals reveal corresponding characteristics. For example, if *sattva guṇa* is predominant in a man, he has *sāttvikī śraddhā*, he is pure and altruistic. He aspires after salvation. If *rajas* is predominant, he has *rājasī śraddhā* and he runs after inferior pleasures and works for limited and selfish goals. If *tamas* is predominant, he has *tāmasī śraddhā*, a *tāmasa* man has no idea of a definite spiritual goal nor does he feel the need for resorting to any prescribed means. *Tāmasī śraddhā* is actually the negation of *śraddhā*.²¹

Sattvic shraddha is spiritual, rajasic shraddha is present in the performance of karma, and tamasic shraddha is unrighteous. These three types of shraddha are in the domain of the *guṇas*. Apart from these, there exists *nirguṇā śraddhā*, which is faith in service to God:

*Sāttviky-ādhyātmikī śraddhā
karma-śraddhā tu rājasī;
Tāmasy-adharme yā śraddhā
matsevāyām tu nirguṇā.*²²

Functions of Shraddha

So far we have seen what shraddha is, its necessity

and importance. Let us now see how it directs and enhances the progress of an aspirant towards the goal.

(i) Shraddha brings out all the powers lying dormant in an individual. Swami Vivekananda says: 'All progress and power are already in every man ... only it is barred in and prevented from taking its proper course. If anyone can take the bar off, in rushes nature. Then the man attains the powers which are his already.'²³ Therefore, everything consists in taking the bar off, in connecting with God:

Faith is but the wire that connects the lamp of consciousness in us to the central power station that is God. The light that burns in our lamp derives its energy from the central house. If we are able to excel in any field of endeavour, it is only because we have knowingly or unknowingly connected ourselves to the Infinite Excellence that is the Supreme. When the Lord says in the Gita that the doubter perishes, it is this that he means. The doubter who lacks faith omits to connect himself to the central source of power. And then he complains that his tiny light does not burn. The stronger our faith in the Divine, the easier becomes the solution to all problems.²⁴

(ii) Shraddha becomes the breeding ground of all virtues:

*Ādau śraddhā tataḥ sādhu-saṅgo'ṭha
bhajana-kriyā;
Tato'nartha-nivṛttiḥ syāt-tato
niṣṭhā rucis-tataḥ.
Athāsaktis-tato bhāvas-tataḥ
premābhyudañcati;
Sādhakānām-ayam premṇaḥ
prādurbhāve bhavet kramaḥ.*

In the beginning comes shraddha, which leads to association with the holy, and then to acts of worship, which results in destruction of sins, leading to steadfastness, and then interest (in the ways of bhakti). Next comes attachment (to bhajana), which results in deep spiritual moods, culminating in the appearance of pure love. This is the sequence for the awakening of pure love in sadhakas.²⁵

Explaining Vyasa's commentary on the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, Swami Hariharananda Aranya says: 'Śraddhā leads to Vīrya. People who have no reverential faith in their objectives cannot apply any energy to attain them. By fixing the mind repeatedly on a subject, notwithstanding the attending discomfort, memory or recollection thereof is obtained. When it gets fixed, it leads to concentration. Concentration brings forth supreme knowledge.'²⁶

(iii) Shraddha makes all practices bear fruit. Many people practise spiritual discipline but all do not reap the results. The reason is that one must have faith in the efficacy of spiritual practices. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Why shouldn't a man succeed if he practices sādhanā? But he doesn't have to work hard if he has real faith.'²⁷ Swami Brahmananda says: 'Women have greater faith than men. That is why they succeed in a comparatively shorter time.'²⁸ Again: 'God can be realized by true faith alone. And the realization is hastened if you believe everything about God. The cow that picks and chooses its food gives milk only in dribbles, but if she eats all kinds of plants, then her milk flows in torrents.'²⁹ The Gita also states: 'Śraddhāvānṛṇāḥ jñānam; one who has faith gains knowledge.'³⁰

(iv) Shraddha removes the doubting tendency of the mind. One's spiritual progress continues well as long as one's shraddha is intact. As soon as doubt arises, progress stops. A story told by Sri Ramakrishna explains this:

A man was about to cross the sea from Ceylon to India. Bibhishana said to him: 'Tie this thing in a corner of your wearing-cloth, and you will cross the sea safely. You will be able to walk on the water. But be sure not to examine it, or you will sink.' The man was walking easily on the water of the sea—such is the strength of faith—when having gone part of the way, he thought, 'What is this wonderful thing Bibhishana has given me, that I can walk even on the water?' He untied the knot and found only a leaf with the name of Rāma written on it. 'Oh, just this!' he thought, and instantly he sank.³¹

Shraddha in the injunctions of the scriptures and the guru protects the sadhaka. Vyasa says in his commentary on the *Yoga Sutra*: 'Sā hi jananiṇīva kalyāṇī yogināṃ pāti; [faith] sustains a Yogin like a loving mother.'³²

(v) Shraddha alone keeps one's spiritual practices going during the so-called dry spiritual periods. During such periods, though the intellect understands its weakness, the heart cannot give up hope, and this occurs thanks to shraddha. The Bengali poet-saint Ramprasad says in one of his songs:

But while my mind has understood,
alas! my heart has not;
Though but a dwarf, it still would strive
to make a captive of the moon.³³

(vi) Shraddha makes one fearless and helps to overcome temptations. In the *Katha Upanishad* we see Nachiketa, a mere boy, possessing intense shraddha. As a result, when his father tells him in a fit of anger that he would gift him to Yama, the god of death, Nachiketa goes away fearlessly to Yama simply for the sake of truth and to ensure fulfilment of his father's yajna. He had no ill feeling towards his father. On the contrary, he first asked Yama for his father's well being, and only then for the knowledge of Brahman. Yama tried to tempt him with all sorts of enjoyments, but the boy would not yield. Yama was pleased with Nachiketa's dispassion and proceeded to instruct him about Brahman.

(vii) Shraddha alone can take one to God-realization even if one does not possess any other virtue. Intense shraddha is sufficient to achieve the highest realization. Sri Ramakrishna says:

What can one not achieve through simple faith! Once there was an annaprāsana ceremony in a guru's house. ... He had one disciple, a very poor widow, who owned a cow. She milked it and brought the guru a jar of milk. He had thought she would take charge of all the milk and curd for the festival. Angry at her poor offering, he threw the milk away and said to her, 'Go and drown yourself.' The widow accepted this as his command

and went to the river to drown herself. But God was pleased with her guileless faith and, appearing before her, said: 'Take this pot of curd. You will never be able to empty it. ... This will satisfy your teacher' (1016).

The sheer childlike faith of the guileless woman, which her guru himself did not have, proved to be sufficient for obtaining God's blessings.

Means of Attaining Shraddha

Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavata:

*Satām prasaṅgān-mama vīrya-saṁvido
bhavanti hyt-karṇa-rasāyanāḥ;
Taj-joṣaṇād-āśvapavarga-vartmani
śraddhā ratir-bhaktir-anukramiṣyati.*

Through close association with sadhus, one comes to hear accounts of my glorious deeds, which is very pleasing to the ear and the heart. The enjoyment of that bliss gives rise to shraddha, *ratī*—delight in God—and bhakti, one after the other.³⁴

Shraddha is quickly aroused by good company. Sri Ramakrishna also says: 'First the company of holy men. That awakens śraddhā, faith in God.'³⁵ But together with the company of people who have real shraddha, God's grace is also to be sought, as it is God who enhances that shraddha: '*Tasya tasyācalām śraddhām tāmeva vidadhāmyaham*'; that very firm faith of the devotee, I strengthen.'³⁶

In the Bhagavata, Sri Krishna mentions shraddha as one of the

sattvic *vyttis*.³⁷ Those who can develop a pure and sattvic nature can attain a high level of shraddha. Absolute continence is the key to purity, and shraddha is directly connected to brahmacharya. Swami Vivekananda says: 'Every boy should be trained to practise absolute Brahmacharya, and then, and then only, faith—Shraddha—will come.'³⁸ Swami Brahmananda says: 'How simple and strong is the faith of little boys! They believe what they hear from others and try to act accordingly. They attain success wherever they apply their undistracted mind. But when age advances, the mind is occupied with many things. It becomes restless and always wants to wander. ... It acquires the tendency to become sceptical. It begins to doubt everything. At last these people reach such a state that it becomes very hard for them to have faith in anything.'³⁹

Shraddha and Reason

Swami Vivekananda says: 'One [the analytical side of human nature] will accept nothing until it has the shining seal of reason; the other [the emotional

side] has faith and what it cannot see it believes. Both are necessary. A bird cannot fly with only one wing.'⁴⁰ 'A man must not only have faith but intellectual faith too. To make a man take up everything and believe it, would be to make him a lunatic' (5.244). 'Why was reason given us if we have to believe? Is it not tremendously blasphemous to believe against reason? What right have we not to use the greatest gift that God has given to us? I am sure God will pardon a man who



will use his reason and cannot believe, rather than a man who believes blindly instead of using the faculties He has given him. We must reason; and when reason proves to us the truth of these prophets and great men about whom the ancient books speak in every country, we shall believe in them' (6.12). Reason helps inspiration. 'It is reason that develops into inspiration, and therefore inspiration does not contradict reason, but fulfils it. Things which reason cannot get at are brought to light by inspiration; and they do not contradict reason' (2.390).

However, the same Swami Vivekananda showed the limits of reason: 'We first perceive, then reason later' (7.75). 'To reach Truth by reason alone is impossible, because imperfect reason cannot study its own fundamental basis' (6.42). 'Reason can go only to a certain extent, beyond that it cannot reach' (1.150). 'Reasoning is limiting something by our own minds. We throw a net and catch something, and then say that we have demonstrated it; but never, never can we catch God in the net' (7.10).

Thus, both faith in the scriptures and reason as sanctioned by the Shrutis become unavoidable for spiritual progress.

What then is the basis of faith? Or is it only self-deception? 'Faith,' says Rabindranath Tagore, 'is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark.' It is therefore not mere belief or hope; it is a sense of certainty about the future. It is the faculty of penetrating further than the myopic multitude can see. It is a search-light that can scan the encircling gloom and spot out Truth. Those who deny it are simply prosaic persons who lack the poetic vision. ... Rationalism is faith in Reason. But reason is only one of our faculties. If reason raises man above the mere animal, so does faith. Faith does not belong to the sub-human world. The degree of faith is the measure of man's superiority over lower creatures. The range of the eye of faith is even greater than that of reason. ... Life is larger than what would be admitted by reason. To ignore its vastness and complexity by the test of reason alone is to put on blinkers. To throw away faith as something irrational is to throw away the most precious part of life. ... Rationalism must re-

inforce our faith instead of undermining it, for in their synthesis lies our salvation.⁴¹

It becomes clear then that 'faith is supra-rational and not contra-rational. It is not a-logical but supra-logical. ... Sincerity, strength, and a sense of the sublime are what characterize real faith.'⁴²

India's Regeneration and Shraddha

Swami Vivekananda was of the opinion that the degradation India was suffering during his time was due to the loss of shraddha. He said: 'It is by losing this idea of Shraddha that the country has gone to ruin, and that 'want of Shraddha has brought in all the evils among us.'⁴³ Therefore, for Swamiji, to rekindle that pristine shraddha is the great challenge of Indian people: 'The idea of true Shraddha must be brought back once more to us, the faith in our own selves must be reawakened, and, then only, all the problems which face our country will gradually be solved by ourselves' (5.332). By shraddha Swamiji meant faith in our own essential divinity as well as in the divinity of others: 'It is not selfish faith, because the Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all, because you are all. ... It is the great faith which will make the world better' (2.301).

When shraddha is lost, one starts hating and criticizing oneself and others. 'This is the surest index of the decay of a civilization, of its utter insufficiency, its spiritual poverty. When man loses faith in himself, he loses faith in everyone and everything else as well, and the gate is opened to all-round degeneration. Swami Vivekananda sounded the note of warning about the centuries-old loss of *śraddhā* by the people of India more than sixty years ago.'⁴⁴ And this was Swamiji's note of warning: 'Give up the awful disease that is creeping into our national blood, that idea of ridiculing everything, that loss of seriousness. Give that up. Be strong and have this Shraddha, and everything else is bound to follow.'⁴⁵

Shraddha Pervades All

As has been stated earlier, shraddha is not only a virtue, it is an intrinsic aspect of human nature.

When one develops shraddha, one's whole being is, as it were, awakened to the object of that shraddha, to an ideal; and in consequence body, mind, and senses respond in unison to the call of the inner Spirit, giving rise to the virtues that are essential at different stages of the process of realizing that ideal. Therefore, it is reiterated that without shraddha no great or small ideal can be achieved. And it is only a shraddha of sattvic nature that takes one to the highest goal. Such shraddha is not mere belief or blind faith; it is a full affirmation of the transcendental experience of the seers, followed by a total commitment—with body, mind, and soul—to attain the goal set by them.

This shraddha has its practical application not only in spiritual matters but in all other dimensions of the human being as well as of society. The ideal may be secular or transcendental, but the effort invariably begins with shraddha. That is why Swami Vivekananda wanted first to awaken shraddha among Indians to help them achieve total regeneration of their country. Everything in this world can be achieved through shraddha. And it is in this sense that the *Vahni Purana* says that the whole world is pervaded by shraddha: 'Śraddhā sarvamidam jagat'.⁴⁶

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Vairagya: Path to Freedom

Swami Mahayogananda

PEOPLE ARE AFRAID OF *VAIRĀGYA*. They think it means they will have to give up everything—and people are afraid of renunciation. ‘Oh no, not that! We hold to both—with one hand we hold to God and with the other we do our duties. We practise mental renunciation.’ That’s all well and good. Sri Ramakrishna prescribed just that—mental renunciation—for householders. Only monks are to give up everything. But this fear is a curious phenomenon. It prevents us from seeing what the scriptures, what the saints and sages continually aver: that vairagya is the key to freedom, peace, and joy. And that is what all people seek, knowingly or unknowingly: peace, freedom, and joy. Vairagya—detachment, dispassion, renunciation—is not something to be feared, but a powerful friend in our quest for freedom, an effective tool in our spiritual toolbox.

Wherefrom Vairagya?

The fifteenth-century scholar-monk Sadananda calls vairagya ‘an utter disregard for all objects of enjoyment, both here in this world and hereafter in any heavenly realm.’¹ Now, this sounds awfully austere and joyless; perhaps we were right to fear vairagya after all. Let us look more closely.

Traditional teachers of Vedanta identify four prerequisites for spiritual aspirants, the *sādhana-catuṣṭaya*, lacking which one is not yet qualified to undertake spiritual practice. Though they are stipulated especially for the path of knowledge, for jñāna yoga, they serve as a guide for all serious seekers, in whichever way they may approach the

Divine. *Viveka*, *vairāgya*, *śamādi-śatka-sampatti*, and *mumukṣutva*—discernment, dispassion, the six treasures like calmness, forbearance, and faith, and longing for liberation—these four disciplines are intimately connected; they rest one upon the other.

We are first asked to examine the human experience, our experience in the world, with a clear, unsentimental gaze, and look for what is permanent and what is unchanging in it. If we see properly, behind the surface, we realize that nothing is devoid of change. Our bodies grow for a few years; then gradually decay sets in. The hair turns grey, the jowls sag, the teeth fall out, the back gives way; finally the body returns to the elements of which it is made. Our minds too are constantly changing. Yesterday we were crabby; today we are cheerful—our emotions change moment to moment. Our thoughts are in constant motion, bouncing from one thing to another like a rubber ball. Even our personality—that complex of ideas, attitudes, likes and dislikes, desires, ambitions, and tendencies that we lump together and call ‘I’, that too is in constant flux. And of course, all matter is changing; everything in the universe—and the very universe itself—is impermanent. Everything, our homes, schools, temples, mountains, oceans, and this very earth itself will crumble into dust one day. The whole earth, what to speak of our little lives!

We don’t like this. We resist this fact of the inevitable destruction of everything material, and especially the destruction of our own bodies. We try to hide our aging with surgery and dye, to arrest it with diet, vitamins, exercise, and drugs, and to somehow delay the inevitable. There is a good reason for this resistance: we cannot accept our impermanence because we are *not* in fact impermanent. Our true nature is the indestructible Self, the

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Atman, the infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss beyond space and time, beyond mind and speech. But, identified as we are with body and mind, we try to make *them* permanent; and this is a project doomed to failure. We are all seeking to experience joy, which is our divine birthright and our true nature, but we are looking for it in the wrong place, in that which is temporary; thus our happiness too is temporary, and is followed by misery. We are seeking freedom, but we make the mistake of seeking freedom *for* the senses instead of freedom *from* the senses.

Viveka, discernment, means facing squarely this fact of impermanence. We analyse our human condition and understand that all we take to be real is impermanent and changing. We realize that the Eternal alone—that Reality which is described by the saints and sages as *sat-cit-ānanda*, Atman, Brahman, God—is permanent, and that there is no other goal to be sought but That; that nowhere else can we find unalloyed joy.

There comes a time in the life of every fortunate person when one realizes the utter futility of seeking the permanent in the impermanent, the eternal in the ephemeral, the unchanging in this sea of change. That is when vairagya arises. It is a divine discontent, a disgust for our endless pursuit of the fleeting. We feel fed up with ourselves for chasing happiness where it can never be found. Even the happiness of heaven doesn't interest us; for that too, we understand, is temporary. No, we want the Real, the Eternal, the Imperishable.

Swami Vivekananda says:

All the power of knowledge and wealth once made has passed away—all the sciences of the ancients, lost, lost forever. Nobody knows how. That teaches us a grand lesson. Vanity of vanities; all is vanity and vexation of the spirit. If we have seen all this, then we become disgusted with this world and all it offers us. This is called Vairāgya, non-attachment, and is the first step towards knowledge.

The natural desire of man is to go towards the senses. Turning away from the senses takes him back to God. So the first lesson we have to learn is to turn away from the vanities of the world.²

So vairagya, this utter disregard for objects of enjoyment, be they material objects or intangibles like name and fame, is a natural development; it comes of itself when the time is ripe, and is the sure outcome of *viveka* correctly undertaken.

Sri Ramakrishna reminds us:

It is not possible to acquire *vairagya*, renunciation, all at once. The time factor must be taken into account. But it is also true that a man should hear about it. When the right time comes, he will say to himself, 'Oh yes, I heard about this.'

You must also remember another thing. By constantly hearing about renunciation one's desire for worldly objects gradually wears away. One should take rice-water in small doses to get rid of the intoxication of liquor. Then one gradually becomes normal.³

Another fact to remember is that there *will* come a time when we shall have to give up everything; at the time of our death we must relinquish all, willingly or unwillingly. Spiritual aspirants strive to make that final renunciation a willing one by preparing for it now.

Vairagya and Yoga

Vairagya plays a role in all the four yogas, the paths of knowledge, meditation, work, and devotion. Swami Vivekananda calls it 'the basis of all the yogas'.⁴ We have mentioned the path of jnana, of knowledge, at the outset. The jnana-yogi must have strong vairagya to succeed in piercing the veil of maya by the force of philosophical analysis. In the path of meditation, of raja yoga, we need detachment from the thoughts and desires that distract us when we try to meditate. The path of work, karma yoga, is all about detachment, not detachment from action but from the fruits of action, from the results of our work. In the path of devotion, bhakti yoga, we are to give our hearts to God. We cannot do so if we still have attachments; if the heart longs for name and fame or ice cream sundaes, can it be fully given to the Lord?

For success in meditation vairagya is indispensable. We are to direct the meditating mind, like an

unbroken stream of oil poured from one pitcher into another, to the Divine. If while pouring oil we stick a finger in the stream, it will break up, and we will make a mess. Our samskaras stick their finger in the stream of our meditation, and the mind is distracted. That is why both Patanjali and Sri Krishna emphasize two tools for improving our meditation: *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, repeated practice and detachment.⁵ As often as it strays do we bring the mind back into focus. It is constantly drawn outwards, constantly distracted, and we persevere in dragging it back. But, if the mind is to settle firmly on the object of meditation, we must detach ourselves from the thoughts, desires, and emotions that distract us; hence *vairāgya*.

Why do we face so much difficulty in meditation? Simply put, we are more interested in things other than God. The stronger attachment wins out. True *vairāgya* must thus be a twofold movement: a turning *away* from temporal things and a turning *towards* the Eternal.

Attachment and Desire

Where does attachment come from? The Bhagavad-gita explains that merely by 'thinking of objects, attachment for them grows.'⁶ Shankaracharya calls

attachment a 'liking for things arising from association.'⁷ We associate with various people and things, and have various experiences. The mind naturally wants to repeat those associations and experiences that give it pleasure and wants to avoid those that give it pain. Thus arise *rāga*, attachment, and its corollary, *dveṣa*, aversion. And these lead to desire, anger, and hatred—all serious obstacles for the spiritual aspirant.

Attachments impede the flow of our thought. Just as obstructions in a stream bed cause the water to form eddies and whirlpools, and even stagnant pools off to the side, so do obstructions in the mind—desires and attachments—create thought eddies in which the same thoughts revolve uselessly over and over again and from which we can't seem to escape. They are like scratches in a record: the scratch prevents the needle from continuing in its groove, and the same passage is played over and over again until one gives the needle a gentle nudge. We think in the same old ruts, driven by our samskaras, the tendencies to seek pleasure and avoid pain; and most of us live in these mental ruts. When we feel trapped by this thinking-in-ruts, when we want to break free from this bondage, it's time to apply *vairāgya*, time to give the needle of the mind a nudge.



It is perhaps when we start trying to meditate that we first become aware of this habit of thinking in the same old lines, and hence begin to feel the need for detachment. But the mind is like a spoiled dog! Suppose one spoils a dog, letting it jump up into one's lap whenever it likes, fondling it when it does so, and feeding it scraps from the table when it begs for them. If one has a change of heart and decides the dog should no longer be permitted to do so, it won't at first obey. It will continue to try to jump into one's lap, continue to beg for scraps. Only after repeated scoldings and a few good slaps will it learn the new rules. We have allowed our minds to think all kinds of unhealthy thoughts. If we now tell it to give up those thoughts, it won't at first obey. We shall have to give it a few slaps!

One method for giving such slaps, described in the Gita, is *doṣānudarśana*, perceiving the defects in the object of attachment.⁸ When we can convince ourselves that attachment to a particular thing or emotion or idea is useless or harmful, that such attachment stands as a bar to our spiritual progress and thus brings great misery to us, detachment naturally arises and we gain a zeal for giving it up, detaching ourselves from it. This is, in effect, what we do through discernment between the permanent and the impermanent—everything is found to have the defect of impermanence.

The poet-sage Bhartrihari, in his hundred-verse *Vairagya Shataka*, follows this method of finding the defects in attachment to sense-enjoyment. One of these verses was especially loved by Swami Vivekananda. Bhartrihari finds that everything gives rise to *bhaya*, fear, and that only *vairagya* is fearless:

*Bhoge roga-bhayam kule cyuti-bhayam
vite nṛpālād-bhayam
Māne dainya-bhayam bale ripu-bhayam
rūpe jarāyā bhayam;
Shastre vādi-bhayam guṇe khala-bhayam
kāye kṛtāntād-bhayam;
Sarvaṁ vastu bhayānvitam bhuvi nṛnām
vairāgyam-evābhayam.*

In enjoyment is the fear of disease; in social position, the fear of falling-off; in wealth, the fear of

(hostile) kings;

In honour, the fear of humiliation; in power, the fear of enemies; in beauty, the fear of old age;

In scriptural erudition, the fear of opponents; in virtue, the fear of scandal; in the body, the fear of death.

In this life, all is fraught with fear; *vairagya* alone is fearless.⁹

Swami Vivekananda embodied the ideals of fearlessness and renunciation, and exhorted his disciples to do likewise; it is no wonder he loved this verse.

When we first resolve to practise detachment, it is difficult, painful—the slaps we give to the dog sometimes sting. But it finally leads to great joy. The Gita explains this in a wonderful pair of verses. Such joy, it says, is *sattvic* joy; it tastes like poison at first, but like nectar at the end. *Rajasic* joy, on the other hand, is joy in the senses, which tastes like nectar at the outset, but like poison at the end.¹⁰ Swami Vivekananda also confirms this: 'The first step in *Vairagya* is very painful. When perfected, it yields supreme bliss.'¹¹

To Work You Have the Right ...

Karma yoga is the path of work without attachment: the karma-yogi must work without craving for the results of that work. Only when one works in this way can work be called yoga. Sri Ramakrishna has some stern words of caution for the karma-yogi:

It is not possible for you to give up work altogether. Your very nature will lead you to it whether you like it or not. Therefore the scriptures ask you to work in a detached spirit, that is to say, not to crave the work's results. For example, you may perform devotions and worship, and practise austerities, but your aim is not to earn people's recognition or to increase your merit.

To work in such a spirit of detachment is known as *karmayoga*. But it is very difficult. We are living in the *Kaliyuga*, when one easily becomes attached to one's actions. You may think you are working in a detached spirit, but attachment creeps into the mind from nobody knows where. You may worship in the temple or arrange a grand religious festival

or feed many poor and starving people. You may think you have done all this without hankering after the results. But unknown to yourself the desire for name and fame has somehow crept into your mind. Complete detachment from the results of action is possible only for one who has seen God.¹²

So the karma-yogi must be always on guard, always watchful, for attachment creeps into the mind 'from nobody knows where'. A good dose of vairagya is needed. And we can remember that, as Swami Vivekananda says: 'If working like slaves results in selfishness and attachment, working as master of our own mind gives rise to the bliss of non-attachment.'¹³

Vairagya Made Easy?

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'The more you move eastward, the farther you are from the west.'¹⁴ This is the secret to making vairagya easy and palatable: as we approach the Divine, our desires and attachments naturally fall off by themselves. Sri Ramakrishna elaborates: 'When the mind is united with God, one sees Him very near, in one's own heart. ... The more you realize this unity, the farther your mind is withdrawn from worldly things.'¹⁵

Swami Vivekananda explains how vairagya functions in the path of devotion. He says:

The Bhakti-Yogi ... knows the meaning of life's struggles; he understands it. He has passed through a long series of these struggles and knows what they mean and earnestly desires to be free from the friction thereof; he wants to avoid the clash and go direct to the centre of all attraction, the great Hari. This is the renunciation of the Bhakta. This mighty attraction in the direction of God makes all other attractions vanish for him.

This mighty infinite love of God which enters his heart leaves no place for any other love to live there. How can it be otherwise? Bhakti fills his heart with the divine waters of the ocean of love, which is God Himself; there is no place there for little loves. That is to say, the Bhakta's renunciation is that Vairāgya or non-attachment for all things that are not God which results from Anurāga or great attachment to God.¹⁶

Sri Ramakrishna agrees that vairagya 'does not mean simply dispassion for the world. It means dispassion for the world and also longing for God'—that is, *virāga* and *anurāga*.¹⁷ These are the two wings of the bird of vairagya.

Trailokyanath Sannyal, the brahmo singer, asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'What is the way to dry up the craving for worldly pleasure?'; Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'Pray to the Divine Mother with a longing heart. Her vision dries up all craving for the world and completely destroys all attachment to "lust and gold".'¹⁸ Again, he said, 'A man who has tasted even a drop of God's ecstatic love looks on "lust and gold" as most insignificant. He who has tasted syrup made from sugar candy regards a drink made from treacle as a mere trifle.'¹⁹ It is a matter of tasting higher joy, spiritual joy. Once we taste spiritual joy, we no longer relish the happiness of sense pleasure, money, or fame.

Two Misconceptions

It may seem that if we are to practise vairagya, we can expect a cold, hard, joyless life, until at last, maybe, we get some spiritual realization. This is not correct. First of all, there is a joy in self-mastery, a sattvic joy. Though it may taste a little sour at first, it tastes like nectar afterwards. The aspirant begins to taste a new freedom, a new peace, as the hold of the old samskaras is gradually loosened.

Moreover, giving up *hankering* for enjoyment is not quite the same as giving up *enjoyment*. Swami Vivekananda was a living embodiment of renunciation. But how much he enjoyed ice cream! At Ridgely Manor, Swami Vivekananda and the other guests would have supper around the big dining table; and Swamiji would want to get up for a walk or a smoke after the meal. To keep him at the table—for they loved to bask in his company—Betty Legget would serve ice cream. Maude Stumm, one of the guests, recalled: 'A very quick word from Lady Betty that she believed there was to be ice cream would turn him back instantly, and he would sink into his place with a smile of expectancy and pure delight sel-

dom seen on the face of anybody over sixteen. He just loved it, and he had all he wanted, too.’²⁰ Yes, the swami enjoyed ice cream; but it seems he never *longed* for it—he was perfectly happy without it. Then again, it seems he was able to enjoy it more than the others could.

It’s a kind of paradox: the truly detached person has the ability to enjoy more intensely, more fully, precisely because he or she is completely unattached. This brings William Blake’s poem to mind:

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity’s sun rise.²¹

This famous couplet, written perhaps two hundred years ago, expresses a certain truth about detachment. One who tries to hold on to a joy, to bind it or repeat it, paradoxically loses it, while one who ‘kisses the joy as it flies’, without becoming attached to it, attains a higher joy, ‘Eternity’s sun rise’.

Another misconception is that practising vairagya means being cold, unfeeling, or hard-hearted. There is such a thing as hard-heartedness, as cold indifference, as a compassionless heart; and someone might claim vairagya as an excuse for ignoring his or her responsibilities, but this is not real vairagya. Vairagya emphasizes giving up desire for enjoyment of temporal happiness, not giving up compassion or responsibilities. In rare cases a person has such intense longing for God that he or she manifests an intense dispassion for everything else; such a person gives up everything in quest of God. Sri Ramakrishna forgot everything, gave up even sleep in quest of the Divine. If we see someone giving up duties and responsibilities in the name of dispassion but not burning with longing for God—for instance, not spending the night in intense prayer and meditation—we can know it is a false giving up. Those with real vairagya can actually be more compassionate, because they become more unselfish. Such people can love more freely because their love doesn’t carry expectations of reward.

Strong Renunciation


There is a special kind of vairagya by which we proceed speedily to the spiritual goal. What is it like? Sri Ramakrishna explained it with the help of one of his wonderful parables:

One can free oneself from attachment to ‘lust and gold’ if, by the grace of God, one cultivates a spirit of strong renunciation [*tivra vairāgya*]. ...

At one time there was a drought in a certain part of the country. The farmers began to cut long channels to bring water to their fields. One farmer was stubbornly determined, he took a vow that he would not stop digging until the channel connected his field with the river. He set to work. The time came for his bath, and his wife sent their daughter to him with oil. ‘Father,’ said the girl, ‘it is already late. Rub your body with oil and take your bath.’ ‘Go away!’ thundered the farmer. ‘I have too much to do now.’ It was past midday, and the farmer was still at work in his field. He didn’t even think of his bath. Then his wife came and said: ‘Why haven’t you taken your bath? The food is getting cold. You overdo everything. You can finish the rest tomorrow or even today after dinner.’ The farmer scolded her furiously and ran at her, spade in hand, crying: ‘What? Have you no sense? There’s no rain. The crops are dying. What will the children eat? You’ll all starve to death. I have taken a vow not to think of bath and food today before I bring water to my field.’ The wife saw his state of mind and ran away in fear. Through a whole day’s back-breaking labour the farmer managed by evening to connect his field with the river. Then he sat down and watched the water flowing into his field with a murmuring sound. His mind was filled with peace and joy. He went home, called his wife, and said to her, ‘Now give me some oil and prepare me a smoke.’ With serene mind he finished his bath and meal, and retired to bed, where he snored to his heart’s content. The determination he showed is an example of strong renunciation.²²

Strong renunciation comes when the time is ripe. Then there is no turning back. As Swami Vivekananda recounts: ‘Sometimes the thing comes upon them in a flash. There was a boy, for instance,

who used to come to read the Upanishads with Abhedananda. One day he turned and said, "Sir, is all this really true?" "Oh yes!" said Abhedananda, "It may be difficult to realize, but it is certainly true." And next day, that boy was a silent Sannyasin, nude, on his way to Kedarnath!²³

Like that boy, the time must come for us too, some day or other, some lifetime or other, when we shall weary of the endless 'round of smiles and tears', turn our backs on it—shun it as worthless dross—and turn our faces towards the Himalayan heights of God-realization. And the saints and sages of all the ages assure us that we must reach the goal. 

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Of all the systems of Indian philosophy, the Vedanta has the largest following in contemporary India. ... It is encouraging to note that there is an increasing tendency among them to view the Vedantic philosophy as world-affirming, activist and value-centred. They accepted sannyasa as an institution (ashrama) oriented towards religio-social activities. The task they set to examine and accomplish were social issues, interpersonal relations, growth of the individual personality and creativity, a sense of unity, self-esteem and the cultivation and preservation of a unique sense of identity in terms of Indian values and meanings. The most striking feature of these architects of modern India was their resuscitation of the style of a sannyasin who was not a stranger to his own people. They had nothing to fear from him and he had nothing to take from them. Yet his status was irreconcilable with any kind of escapism or isolationism. His attitude is not that of a simple spectator watching a show. He participates in the human drama with a personal de-

tachment. To the extent he is attached, to that extent he is precluded from participation. Renunciation, for them, was a renunciation of attachment in the interest of efficient and genuine participation. In a sense, renunciation for them was a disinterested interestedness. In the light of this it is easy to see why Vivekananda, Swami Rama Tirtha, and Mahatma Gandhi were such successful innovators universally acceptable in India. They all fought against 'isolated individualism' and took renunciation as a guiding principle in opposing such a misconstrued notion. This strong sense of purpose based on the 'ascetic' ideal generated an atmosphere of hopefulness and strength which served to a considerable extent to create a nationwide revival. The life of activism, thus derived, became the expression of the spiritual order which took precedence over all petty considerations. ... In the contemporary Indian philosophical context, I would call it the institutional theory of renunciation. —Kapil Tiwari,

Dimensions of Renunciation in Advaita Vedanta, 135-6

Brahmacharya and Its Practice

Swami Yukteshananda

THE WORD 'BRAHMACHARYA' is a compound comprising two elements: *brahma* and *carya*. The term *brahma* has several meanings: Brahman, the Creator Brahma, the Vedas, and continence, among others. *Carya* is derived from the root *car*, which implies movement, and derivatively refers to behaviour, conduct, practice, performance, and observance. Therefore, 'brahmacharya' can mean the *ācāra*, conduct, which leads to the realization of the supreme Brahman; contemplation on God; study of the Vedas; and practice of celibacy.

It is with this last meaning, practice of self-restraint, that brahmacharya has come to be closely associated; and in popular usage 'brahmacharin' refers to a person who either practises celibacy or has achieved freedom from lust in thought, word, and deed. The word 'celibacy' is derived from the Latin *caelebs*, which means 'unmarried' or 'single'—the state of living unmarried. But brahmacharya does not mean mere bachelorhood. It denotes a deliberate and conscious control of all sense organs and mind with a view to achieving spiritual enlightenment. It involves self-control coupled with discernment and dispassion for the attainment of the higher goal of life. One practising brahmacharya has to be always fully aware of the vow he or she has taken and take proper measures to avoid coming under the sway of the senses. A mere bachelor, on the other hand, may not have any higher motive, such as spiritual enlightenment, behind remaining unmarried. Brahmacharya not only demands the

prevention
of flow of
energy—

physical and mental—through lower channels, but also the conversion of that energy into higher faculties like earnest desire for spiritual freedom, capacity to understand and practise the subtle truths of spirituality, higher or depth memory, tenacity, one-pointedness, discernment, dispassion, and so forth. Thus, brahmacharya involves a total transformation of character; and a well-built character is a source of great power.

Patanjali states: '*Brahmacarya-pratiṣṭhāyām vīryalābhah*'; when continence is established, *vīrya*, energy, is acquired.¹ In his commentary on this sutra, Vyasa explains that '*brahmacaryam guptendriasyopasthasya samyama*'; brahmacharya is the control of the organ of reproduction, and Bhojaraja adds, '*vīrya-nirodho hi brahmacaryam*'; brahmacharya is the retention of sexual energy called *vīrya*. Swami Vivekananda says: 'The Sanskrit name for a student, Brahmacharin, is synonymous with the Sanskrit word Kamajit [one who has full control over his passions].'² Acharya Shankara explains brahmacharya as *maithunāsamacāra*, avoidance of sexual relationship.³ Sexual relationships are again said to be of eight types:

*Śravaṇam kīrtanam kelih
prekṣaṇam guhya-bhāṣaṇam;
Saṅkalpōdhyavasāyāśca
kriyā-niṣpattir-eva-ca.*

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*Etan-maithunam-aṣṭāṅgaṁ
pravādanti maṇiṣiṇaḥ;
Viparītaṁ brahmacharyaṁ
anuṣṭheyaṁ mumukṣubhiḥ.*

Thinking, hearing, and talking of sex; playing with, looking at, and conversing with the opposite sex in secret; resolve, attempt at, and finally the performance of, the sexual act—these are the eight modes of sexuality according to the wise. Continence, which is not doing any of these, should be practised by those who want liberation.⁴

Swami Jagadiswarananda cites the answer of a great saint to his question ‘What is continence?’: ‘Keep your mind as simple, innocent, pure, and unattached as that of a child; and that is continence’ (99).

Swami Subodhananda says: ‘He who is not a slave to his senses and mind, but on the contrary has made them his slaves, is a true Brahmachārīn.’⁵

Brahmacharya Ashrama

In the Vedic age the lifespan of an individual was divided into four ashramas, stations of life: Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, and Sannyasa. According to India’s ancient tradition, every individual had to pass through the stage of brahmacharya before taking up any of the next stages of life. The Brahmacharya Ashrama consisted in staying with the teacher, serving him or her, studying the Vedas, following a life of self-control, and also performing certain austerities. The students remained with the teacher for a fixed period of time after the completion of which they were free to choose their way of life—either returning home to live as a householder or continuing to stay with the teacher while practising life-long celibacy along with other spiritual disciplines, service, and study. The former type was called Upakurvana brahmacharya and the latter Naishthika brahmacharya.

The final purpose of the Brahmacharya Ashrama and its activities was spiritual enlightenment and it served, at the same time, as the foundation of the other three ashramas. The ancient rishis knew well that only if people succeed in this station of life can

they later lead worthy lives in the other ashramas. Those following the ideal of brahmacharya in early youth are capable of becoming ideal householders or ideal sannyasins in future.

Initiation into Brahmacharya Ashrama involves the ritual of *upanayana*. This word means ‘taking the student near the teacher’ or ‘the rite by which the student is taken to the acharya’. *Upanayana* is a samskara, purification rite, during which the student is invested with a sacred thread and imparted the Gayatri mantra, which is a prayer for the awakening of *dhī*, spiritual insight. Therefore, *upanayana* principally means *gāyatrī upadeśa*, instruction in the Gayatri mantra.

It is important to note that even for becoming a householder, a student had to pass through the Brahmacharya Ashrama and undergo training and studies under a guru. Only after acquiring appropriate knowledge were students entitled to marry and lead the life of a householder. The Grihastha Ashrama is of great value, as it is the householder who materially supports the entire community and the other three ashramas. Householders carry great social responsibility and a particular kind of brahmacharya is also mandatory for them. Grihastha Ashrama does not mean giving license to the senses; some desires can be satisfied, but this has to be done within the framework of dharma. Householders are expected to exercise great self-control, and the training for it is acquired in the Brahmacharya Ashrama. Only with this background can a person evolve and achieve fulfilment in life.⁶

Some Physiological and Psychological Aspects

Ayurveda tells us that the food we eat gets converted into *sapta dhātus*, the seven major constitutive elements of the human body: chyle, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and semen. Of these, semen is considered the essence of essences. Retention of semen creates the eighth *dhātu*, *ojas*, in our body. *Ojas* acts as the spiritual force that shapes our personality. For this reason it has been said:

*Marāṇaṁ bindu-pātena
jīvanam bindu-dhāraṇāt;
Tasmād-atiprayatnena
kriyātām bindu-dhāraṇam.*

Retention of semen is life; its loss is death; therefore endeavour to conserve semen with great care.⁷

To be successful, brahmacharya must involve the control of all sense organs. This implies its practice in thought, word, and deed—at mental, intellectual, and physical levels. But, it is the mind that creates the mould called the body with the purpose of experiencing the results of past actions stored in it as samskaras and *vāsanās*, desires. Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of the mind for proper practice of brahmacharya.

The intellect and mind of non-illuminated souls have impure samskaras. In consequence, their perceptions, conclusions, and thoughts are often erroneous, and this leads them into harmful acts. Impure intellects lack proper discernment. Similarly, a mind full of unhealthy impressions carried forward from previous lives is unsteady and tends to think perversely. Such minds and intellects have little control over the senses. The senses, in turn, keep pouring all varieties of information into the mind, making it more fickle. This further confuses the intellect. In this way a vicious cycle is created.

What is the main cause of all this? It is *avidyā*, ignorance, which manifests as kama, desire. And desire leads to selfish action. For all practical purposes *avidyā* is nothing but the body-idea or sex-idea. The word ‘kama’, though meaning desire in general, has come to be particularly identified with lust. This is because, of all desires, the sexual is the most powerful, the forerunner of other negative states like anger and delusion, and is particularly difficult to transcend.

Sri Krishna points out the substratum of desire: ‘The organs, mind, and intellect are said to be its abode. This one [kama] diversely deludes the embodied being veiling knowledge with the help of these.’⁸ The sense organs, which are linked

to the mind, run after objects of desire. The mind enjoys sense objects through the sense organs. But even when the sense organs are not working, mind has the capacity to imagine, calling back from memory—either in waking or in dream state—the input provided by the sense organs, with the aim of vicariously enjoying sense objects. Therefore, both sense organs and mind are seats of desire. But what does Sri Krishna mean when he says that the *buddhi*, intellect, is also the seat of desire and anger?

Intellect is that function of the mind which arrives at firm conclusions and decisions which later take the form of beliefs and convictions which prompt our thoughts and actions. ...When one, through experience, reason or by false belief, is convinced that indulging in sex is good, that it conduces to health, peace and happiness, that it is the only true goal of life and that there is nothing wrong in fulfilling one’s lustful desires by whichever means, then lust is firmly established in its deepest, surest seat in the intellect.⁹

Sublimation

Yoga psychology recommends conscious suppression followed by sublimation of the sexual instinct, but never repression. Sublimation of the sexual instinct is largely a conscious and deliberate process involving ‘facing actual facts and dealing with them creatively’. Initially, this may lead to conflicts and troubles, but a sincere aspirant soon overcomes all these conflicts of the lower planes and ascends to higher planes of consciousness.¹⁰

It is important to note the difference between these two processes: suppression and repression. Suppression is ‘the restraint of an idea, activity, or reaction by something more powerful’ or ‘the conscious inhibition of unacceptable memories, impulses, or desires’. Repression, on the other hand, is a subconscious process involving ‘the action of forcing, desires and urges, especially those in conflict with the accepted standards of conduct, into the unconscious mind, often resulting in abnormal behaviour’. Sublimation is a process of conscious suppression and canalization of libido and not

subconscious repression. In this process the person involved knows that a particular impulse is being suppressed and why it is being suppressed. In addition, the person also exercises sublimation by directing the suppressed energy into higher channels of consciousness with a definite purpose in view. When all the suppressed energy is sublimated, there is no energy left to draw the person down to lower levels of consciousness. Therefore, it is absolutely harmless. Sublimation can also take place spontaneously without much of suppression, even without one being conscious of it, if one's psychic energies are fully focused on higher intellectual or spiritual ideals. Repression, on the contrary, is a harmful process. It pushes the impulses to the unconscious where they remain hidden, though the behaviour of the person continues to be under their influence.

The sexual instinct is a form of energy, and energy can never be destroyed; we can only change its form. All those who have sublimated the sexual impulse ask us to direct our efforts more to the attempt at holding on to higher ideals than to the mere struggle with base instincts. When the hold of the higher ideals is stronger than the pull exerted by base instincts, the latter fall off in a natural way.

What is required for sublimating our energies into higher channels is the purification of our samskaras and the neutralization of negative samskaras. The major portion of our minds is unconscious, the storehouse of samskaras. The purification of the unconscious mind releases great energy because the unconscious mind is also the storehouse of psychic energy. The problem with every fresh spiritual aspirant is that the higher ideal is accepted only in the conscious mind while the unconscious mind continues functioning in its old way. If the unconscious mind can be purified and integrated with the conscious mind, intra-psychic conflict is reduced and brahmacharya greatly facilitated.¹¹

Great spiritual personalities have put stress on certain means for effective sublimation: earnest desire for God, japa, prayer, discernment, meditation, among others. Aids to sublimation can be physical or mental. A few hints follow.

Physical Aids to Sublimation¹²

Swami Vivekananda says: 'The manipulating and controlling of what may be called the finer body, viz the mind, are no doubt higher functions than the controlling of the grosser body of flesh. But the control of the grosser is absolutely necessary to enable one to arrive at the control of the finer.'¹³ Hence the importance of physical means for sublimation.

Avoidance of Frontal Attack on the Senses • Fighting the senses is an art. First the mind is to be raised to a higher mood by means of the will and then the control of the senses can be accomplished by gradual and measured restraint. Otherwise, violent physical and mental reactions may occur, retarding or even stopping the process altogether.

Swami Turiyananda says: 'Control of the senses is not to be brought about by violent effort. Only by realizing Him it is perfectly achieved. But at first one must struggle for this end. Afterwards it becomes quite natural. Still one should never be over-confident. Just as an intelligent hunter catches a deer and ties it up, so after succeeding in controlling the organs one should be alert, and continue to hold the mind and organs in check.'¹⁴

Giving up lustful gaze—which is closely related to curiosity and desire—is particularly important. Swamiji says: 'We must learn how to turn the eyes inwards. The eagerness of the eyes to see outwards should be restricted.'¹⁵

Adjustment of Food Habits • Diet plays an important part in brahmacharya. Different kinds of foods have different effects on the body and mind. The influence of food on brain cells, emotions, and passions is remarkable. Generation of excess bodily energy ought to be avoided. If this happens, the intake of food ought to be reduced for a few days. It is especially important not to overload the stomach and to always eat sparingly at night. It is also desirable to take only nutritious and easily digestible food. Every individual must find out what food suits best his or her psychophysical system.

Control of the Palate • Swami Turiyananda says: 'All trouble is over if the palate and sex impulse

are conquered. ... When the palate is controlled the sex impulse is also controlled. Unless the senses are brought under control there cannot be any spiritual progress.¹⁶

*Tāvaj-jitendriyo na syād-vijitānyendriyaḥ pumān;
Na jayedrasanaṁ yāvaj-jitaṁ sarvaṁ jite rase.*

A man who has controlled all other senses except the palate is not to be considered a master of his senses. When the hankering of the palate is controlled, everything else is controlled.¹⁷

Regulation of Breathing • Simple rhythmic breathing goes a long way in helping keep the mind calm and cheerful. Pranayama learnt from a competent guru can also be a great aid.

External Cleanliness • Cleanliness is conducive to good health, both physical as well as mental. Patanjali also mentions that ‘from the practice of internal and external cleanliness there develops aversion towards one’s own body as well as towards contact with other bodies.’¹⁸

Canalization of the Basic Creative Urge • Performance of activities related to the higher ideals of life are useful in positively directing the basic creative urge inherent in every person. Otherwise, this urge is likely to manifest itself in undesirable ways. Unselfish work, study of scriptures or holy literature, and deep thinking on spiritual matters are especially helpful in this regard.

Avoidance of Idle Talk • Says Swami Brahmananda: ‘If you indulge in idle talk, your brain gets excited, you cannot control your thoughts, and you suffer from sleeplessness and other troubles.’¹⁹ Acharya Shankara also says: ‘*Yogasya prathamadvāraṁ vānnirodhaḥ*; [one of] the first step[s] to yoga is the control of speech.’²⁰

Holy Company • Association with pure-hearted people, who themselves have observed strict continence, has a profound influence on struggling aspirants. The magnetic aura, the spiritual vibrations, and the powerful thought-currents of developed adepts help to tune the minds of sincere seekers practising brahmacharya. But to profit from

holy company, the company of immoral people should be strictly avoided. The company of people with lustful desires is very harmful for brahmacharins. Not only people, but anything that stimulates sexual impulses—sensuous pictures, books, films—are to be avoided.

Avoidance of Intimacy with People of the Opposite Sex • Aspirants, especially beginners, are advised to avoid the company of the opposite sex as far as possible and never to interact intimately with them.

Practice of Yogic Asanas • Regular practice of selected yogic asanas are of considerable help in modulating the sexual impulse. Asanas are not only physical postures but spiritual disciplines as well. They help control the body, senses, and mind. Sound health is a great blessing.

Mental Aids to Sublimation

One can never control the sexual instinct—which has its roots deep within the psychophysical personality—through physical means alone. The majority of the troubles produced by the sex idea originate more at the mental than at the physical level. Unless something inside us responds to outer stimuli there cannot be any physical reaction. Therefore, the problem lies inside us more than in anything we generally call the ‘object of temptation’. Hatred towards the opposite sex or fleeing away from the world is not the means for rising above the sexual instinct. Hatred is nothing but negative attraction. It is subjective change that is required. Following are some mental aids for healthy sublimation of the sexual instinct.

Handling Imagination Judiciously • Many a time we give to certain images stored in our memory a disproportionate sense of reality. As a consequence, their attraction acquires such strength that our conscious mind becomes confused. At that stage, we do not even want to think of the unreality of those images. We forget that images are only images; they become in us real persons, real situations, as it were, leaving us thoroughly bewildered. We should learn to deflate these images and deprive

them of life. It is difficult, no doubt, but this is the way to obliterate them. Incidentally, before attaining some dexterity in the process of sublimation, concentration of the mind may negatively influence our sexual imagination. Concentration of the mind, if not properly directed, makes even harmless pictures dangerously vivid and living, harmless emotions very passionate.

The tactic to be adopted in these cases is never to allow the mind to form disturbing pictures and brood over them. This is achieved by producing counter-thoughts. When there is attraction towards a particular person, for instance, the mind could be instructed to regard that person as a mere shadow, as someone unsubstantial. Then, the charm and influence produced by that person diminishes and the situation becomes more manageable.

Generating Counter-thoughts • Patanjali says: '*Vitarka-bādhane pratipakṣa-bhāvanam*; to obstruct thoughts which are inimical to yoga, contrary thoughts should be brought.'²¹ By constantly thinking good thoughts, the whole of our thought-structure can be transformed. The unconscious mind is like a fertile field: whatever idea is planted in it immediately strikes roots and grows. When good thoughts are planted, the inner resistance to spiritual life gets progressively less. The mind, which once was a kind of relentless enemy, now becomes congenial. It is greatly beneficial to always have a stock of holy thoughts and mental images to resort to whenever undesirable thoughts or feelings arise and try to find expression in mind and body. It is important to do this in a deliberate and systematic way. Japa, meditation, prayer, and repetition of some elevating passages are to be practised regularly, even if the mind is in a restless state. Somehow or other, one has to learn to raise a strong countercurrent of spiritual thought during critical moments. By following this technique one can mentally insulate oneself from impure imagination, thoughts, and attractions.

Connecting All Thoughts to God • Raising counter-thought may be considered an intellectual process. But something closer to one's heart takes

place when we earnestly remember the Divine or any holy personality that appeals to us. This remembrance fills our whole mind with God and naturally prevents it from rushing out towards sense objects. By daily dwelling on the pure life, character, and personality of divine incarnations and holy persons our ego slowly absorbs their noble attributes and undergoes a complete change. This has the power to create in our mind a shield that protects us from the influence of negative impulses.

Those who are always in a higher mood experience less temptation. It is only when a person forgets the higher Self and dwells on a worldly plane that temptations come upon him or her frequently. The moment one slackens in the remembrance of one's *īṣṭa devatā*, Chosen Ideal, the mind comes down and starts feeling worldly attractions. The practice of connecting all thought to one's *īṣṭa devatā* is immensely beneficial for the observance of brahmacharya. When one develops intense love for the *īṣṭa*, one is not troubled by lust.

How can we connect every thought to God? There are several ways. For instance, if a person attracts us, we can set the image of our *īṣṭa* against the image of that person, and then purposely and lovingly think and meditate on the image of our *īṣṭa*. In this way the passion we experience towards a particular person is diverted towards God. Another method is to think that our *īṣṭa* is present in the person that attracts us and try to direct our feelings towards the Divine rather than at the particular person.

Changing Our Attitude towards the Object of Attraction • For example, if the thought of a woman rises in the mind of a brahmacharin, he can associate that form with the image of the Divine Mother or with the form of his own mother. A celibate woman can follow the same process by replacing the form of her attraction with that of a divine personality, or with the thought of her father or brother. The cultivation of the feeling that all women are mothers and all men are sons is very difficult indeed; but the positive effect of this change of attitude towards the person that attracts

the mind is almost immediate. One may fail several times, but celibates have to tenaciously proceed with this attitude. Gradually, the old mind is destroyed and the new mind is fortified. Iron resolve and fiery determination make it possible.

Safeguarding against Mental Deception •

For a very long time, and over many lives, the instinctive urge for reproduction and preservation of lineage and race has been supported only by the power of lust and not by the higher idea of *rta*, universal order. This has created deep impressions in our unconscious and subconscious minds, which are working powerfully in the background. For this reason, despite all our efforts at controlling and sublimating that power, it triggers itself forcibly and overwhelms us.

In certain situations our subconscious mind tends to deceive us, generally in a very subtle way—even by turning diplomatic—and in consequence we may find it difficult to understand its ways and secret operations. To try to access this subconscious mind demands a subtle intellect as well as careful and repeated introspection. We have to develop a highly watchful inner eye capable of scanning the intentions of our own mind at different levels. We should constantly analyse what we feel and what we think in the company of other people—whether anyone attracts our mind sensually. The process demands deep sincerity and humility on our part at all times, not merely under particular circumstances. We have to safeguard against the error of imagining that we have succeeded in getting rid of lust by the mere fact of having lived a secluded life for many years, or by experiencing a little feeling of serenity and purity. Rushing to test oneself may be a sign of overconfidence. Swami Turiyananda advises: ‘Never pride yourself on your having gained control over the passions. If you do, they will at once raise their heads. Ever pray to him, “O Lord, save me from them.”’²²

Repelling Depressive Thoughts •

Guilt feelings are a tremendous torture, and brooding over them only makes the problem worse. Depressive thoughts are very dangerous, both in secular and spiritual

life. Among other things, they weaken us. We have to learn from our mistakes and try fervently not to repeat them, but never brood over past failures. Asking sincere forgiveness with the firm commitment not to repeat the mistake works wonders in reducing depressive thoughts. Sincere apology restores some dignity in the guilty person.

Utilizing Several Weapons •

When we are struggling with our senses and mind over an outward attraction or mental picture, we should have ready at hand several weapons for prompt action. Never should we rely on one means alone. Japa, prayer, intense and one-pointed visualization of a holy personality, repetition of some holy passages, rhythmic breathing, the company of spiritual people, the production of counter-thoughts—one or more of these methods can be utilized as the occasion demands.

The Ultimate Solution

The discussion so far was focused on the preliminary practices needed for aspirants to go deeper into the issue of brahmacharya. The ultimate solution, however, lies in the thorough transformation of one’s consciousness. Sex consciousness is only a part of body consciousness, and only when this is transmuted into divine consciousness is perfect continence in thought and deed attained. When the *anāhata cakra*, heart centre, is awakened one sees the light of the Self. In the glory and splendour of this light, physical beauty and sense cravings disappear. The light of the Atman is not touched by sexual impulses—the Atman is sexless. Even when the aspirant comes down from this higher experience of the Self, its memory lingers in the mind and protects him or her from earthly temptations. After this experience one craves only for spiritual bliss.


The practice of continence is therefore directly connected to the attainment of the experience of a higher order. To attain that experience, to transform our physical consciousness into supra-sensuous awareness, to open the higher centres of consciousness, to keep the mind on a divine

plane—these ought to be our main concern. When this supremely important quest occupies our entire mind and grips our imagination, the problem of sex dwindles and fades away.²³

Brahmacharya or perfect continence is the *sine qua non* of spiritual life; its observance demands great effort and constant alertness. In the words of Swami Vivekananda: ‘A man feels that if he is unchaste, spirituality goes away, he loses mental vigour and moral stamina. That is why in all the religious orders in the world which have produced spiritual giants you will always find absolute chastity insisted upon. That is why monks came into existence, giving up marriage.’²⁴

But there is no reason to be disheartened by the difficulties in its practice. Many have achieved perfect control over baser instincts and many are earnestly struggling to achieve it. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavadgita that the unsteady mind is difficult to control, but it can be tamed through *abhyāsa*, constant practice, and *vairāgya*, detachment. The wind of God’s grace is ever blowing; we are to open our sails to this wind of grace, says Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji also says:

All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves. Therefore, make your own future. ‘Let the dead past bury its dead.’ The infinite future is before you, and you must always remember that each word, thought, and deed, lays up a store for you and that as the bad thoughts and bad works are ready to spring upon like tigers, so also there is the inspiring hope that the good thoughts and good deeds are ready with the power of a hundred thousand angels to defend you always and for ever (2.225).

To purify the unconscious mind and then be able to trust it is the secret for attaining success in the practice of celibacy. Let us be realistic, let us know our present standing and work our way to realize the ideal. *Śraddhā*—faith in one’s ability, sincerity, and whole-heartedness—is the keyword. Through tenacious effort and unbroken alertness we will surely reach the goal. 

Notes and References

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Viveka: Discernment

Br. Agamachaitanya

THE HUMAN BEING has been called ‘the crown of Creation’. What justifies this claim? To animals, food, shelter, sleep, and procreation are the main concerns. Satisfying these basic needs is the be-all and end-all of their existence. Hence, all struggle for existence in the animal realm is crucially dependent on the sense organs. Are we, as humans, any different? Not much, as long as we share these concerns: struggling for survival and having sense delight as our only goal. Confucius puts it rather bluntly: ‘Man differs from the animals only by a little; most men throw that little away.’ What is that ‘little’ which is so prone to be thrown away by humans? Recent scientific studies have shown that humans share ninety-eight per cent of their genetic material with chimpanzees. The line separating humans from animals, making them masters of the latter, is thin indeed.

What Is Viveka?

The uniqueness of human beings lies in their discerning intellect, *viveka*, without which they would be no better than animals. It is discernment that puts humans at the zenith of Creation and allows them control over other creatures. It is this discerning intellect that has enabled humans to survive many a shock that has wiped out hundreds of species. The lifestyle and food habits of a tiger of today is little different from that of his predecessors aeons ago. Nor is it going to change in the years to come. But this is not the case with humans. They have evolved psychosocially with changing circumstances, and continue to do so. But for discerning

wisdom, humans could well have been in the list of extinct races by now.

The term *viveka* comes from the Sanskrit root *vichir*, bearing the connotation of *prithakbhava*, differentiating or discerning. The *Jivanmuktiviveka* explains *viveka* as ‘coming to a conclusion after distinguishing and sorting out things’.¹ It could mean—among other things—the discernment between right and wrong, the moral and the immoral, virtue and vice, the eternal and the transitory, Self and non-Self.

Viveka signifies three things: First, the discerning faculty potentially present in each and every individual, termed *viveka shakti*; all of us are gifted with this faculty. Second, the process of discernment when this aptitude is exercised, termed *viveka kriya* or *viveka vyapara*. Only a few of us consciously *use* this discerning capacity in our daily affairs. Third, the knowledge born of discernment, termed *viveka jnana*. Commonly, the term *viveka* is used to refer to the process of discernment and the resultant knowledge.

We keep coming across choices all through our lives. And making proper choices involves deliberation and thinking. On the nature of our choices depends our success and failure in life. By exercising this responsibility judiciously, humans become the architects of their destiny.

We Mould Our Brains

Recent discoveries in the neurosciences also support the claim that humans are the creators of their own destiny. The brains of lower animals are evolved merely to execute the functions essential for organic survival and are driven by instinct and emotion. This primitive brain—of which the limbic system is an important component—brings about

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the 'fight or flight' reaction in animals confronted with situations threatening survival. This primitive brain is present in humans too, accounting for our emotions, instinctive behaviour, and maintenance of bodily functions. But, as humans, we have a lot more.

With organic evolution, much new behaviour was adopted to make life more comfortable. These were associated with the development of newer areas in the brain which, in the course of millions of years, formed the complex structure above the primitive brain called the neocortex. This development is seen even in apes, but is more specialized in humans. Among the various regions of the neocortex, the areas termed 'frontal lobe' and 'prefrontal cortex'—located in the region of the forehead—are particularly large in humans as compared to other primates.² Hierarchical organization puts the neocortex in control of the primitive brain.

The increase in the volume of the frontal lobe and prefrontal cortex in humans gives them an edge in acquiring and developing higher cognitive capabilities: thinking, planning, creativity, logic, intuition, synthesis of ideas, as well as altruistic mental attributes like compassion.³ As and when new behaviours are learnt, corresponding changes take place in the brain: new neuronal connections are laid down and older connections become stronger through repeated use, thus helping in further cultivation of particular behaviours. This is 'neuronal plasticity'. It has been discovered that the frontal lobe and prefrontal cortex possess greater potential for plastic neuronal changes.⁴ So the brain changes when people change their behaviour and attitude: we mould our brains.

According to the theory of neuroplasticity, thinking and learning can actually change both the brain's physical structure and functional organization. Therefore, once a person gets established in discerning wisdom there will be a corresponding change in his or her brain too. Brains of highly evolved souls, artists, and musicians reflect this difference.

Why We Fail to Discern

Two classes of people generally fail to discern: First, those who do not know what is good and what is bad, who cannot tell one from the other. Infants, the mentally retarded, and people under the influence of drugs or liquor fall under this category. Their activities may largely be guided by instincts. Proper availability of knowledge and training offsets this deficiency. Second, there are people who know what good and bad or right and wrong are, but are not able to act accordingly. We may recall Duryodhana's famous statement in this context: 'I know what righteousness is, yet I cannot get myself to follow it! I know what unrighteousness is, yet I cannot retire from it!'⁵ Even Arjuna echoes the same feeling before Sri Krishna: 'Prompted by what does a person indulge in sin, even against one's wish, being forced as it were?'⁶ This calls for radical treatment. Sri Krishna answers that it is desire in the form of lust that clouds knowledge and prompts us to sin. Therefore, we should check it by controlling the senses by means of the knowledge that the inner Self is far superior to our senses, mind, and intellect and also by practising yoga, the discipline for controlling the mind and senses (3.32–43, 6.5–6).

Viveka is possible only when the mind is calm, is fully in control of its emotions, and has weighed all the available options carefully. That desire clouds our discernment and makes us yield to emotions and impulses is vouched for even by behaviourists.

There are innumerable mental and psychological characteristics that go into the formation of our personality. Mixed in endless ways, these traits—all of which are embedded within our brains—make each human being unique. The experiences we undergo during our childhood are very important in the formation of our character, for it is at this time that brain networks develop fast. Different aspects of our personality take shape in our brains as we grow. These characteristics are likely to stay with us for the rest of our lives. That is the reason why values picked up during childhood have a major influence on our personal and social life.

When it comes to personality, the brain acts like an orchestra. Just as the various sections of an orchestra come together to present a perfect musical ensemble, the different parts of the brain coordinate intricately to give our personality its holistic nature. When our frontal lobes are in full control, our personality becomes a carefully orchestrated melody. Young children often cannot control their behaviour because their frontal lobes are not developed enough to keep the rest of the brain in check. As we step into puberty, marked changes take place in our personality. Puberty has as dramatic an effect on our minds as it has on our bodies. Teenagers get a personality of their own, but they may also become quite insensitive to others' emotions.

During puberty our brains are sprouting a vast number of connections between neurons. Many of these new connections do not yet have specific functions. Researchers suspect that an excess of synapses means the adolescent mind cannot easily keep track of the multiple thoughts that the brain keeps throwing up; nor can it gain secure access to critical memories and emotions that allow grown-ups to make judicious decisions.⁷ Hence, the teen problem of control over emotions and behaviour.

It is evident that the regions of the brain mediating emotions mature ahead of the parts controlling rational thought. 'In other words, teenagers have well-developed emotions and feelings but have still not acquired the ability to think things through.'⁸ This can make teenagers appear confused, frustrated, and moody. Lack of proper support and guidance, especially when they are caught in a constant flux of emotions and are unable to take proper decisions, can turn teenagers into a problem for themselves and society.

Deep inside our brain, in the region of the medial temporal lobe, is a structure responsible for some of our emotions: the amygdala. The amygdala along with the hypothalamus, the cingulate gyrus, and a few other structures constitute the limbic system that mediates emotions like desire, fear, and anger.⁹ Geared to survival needs, the amygdala is quick to recognize threatening situations and initiate aggres-

sive responses. Sri Krishna's answer to Arjuna's riddle corresponds to this fact. We often react to some situations on the spur of the moment, though we know at other times it is not fair to do so. Under the grip of emotions and impulses, humans do not remain what they would like to be. They forget themselves and their surroundings and, with emotions having taken full control of their ability to reason and discern, they fail to see the serious repercussions of their actions.

प्रवृत्तिं च निवृत्तिं च कार्याकार्ये भयाभये ।
बन्धं मोक्षं च या वेत्ति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ सात्त्विकी ॥

O Partha, that intellect is sattvic which understands what is action and what is renunciation of action, what is right action and what wrong, fear and fearlessness, as well as bondage and liberation.

यया धर्ममधर्मं च कार्यं चाकार्यमेव च ।
अयथावत्प्रजानाति बुद्धिः सा पार्थ राजसी ॥

O Partha, that intellect is rajasic which wrongly understands what is dharma and what adharmā, as also what ought to be done and what not.

अधर्मं धर्ममिति या मन्यते तमसावृता ।
सर्वार्थान्विपरीतांश्च बुद्धिः सा पार्थ तामसी ॥

O Partha, that intellect is tamasic which, being enveloped in darkness, regards adharmā as dharma and verily perceives all things contrary to what they are.

—Bhagavadgita, 18.30–32

How to Cultivate Viveka

The frontal lobes act as a check on our impulses. As Karl Pribram puts it: 'The prefrontal cortex is the seat of civilization.'¹⁰ It has been found that if the influence of the frontal lobes is strengthened by meditation and other yogic methods, then emotions can be checked and discerning thinking facilitated. Meditation energizes the prefrontal lobes and, in time, the primitive brain or limbic system becomes harder to arouse. This results in positive personality

changes, 'including better ego integrity, fewer minor psychological problems, less depression and anxiety, and better social skills. Such people tend to have better anger management, more self-control, and tend to be more creative.'¹¹ Developing the habit of meditation helps us in cultivating *viveka*.

There are other methods as well. Reasoning is one among them and should be taught from childhood itself. As already mentioned, attitudes and behaviour cultivated during childhood last a lifetime. So, children must be encouraged to question, reason, and learn things for themselves. Arthur Edgington once posed a question in a BBC broadcast: 'What is the truth about ourselves?' And he proceeded to answer: 'We are a bit of star gone wrong.' That was the first answer, from a purely astrophysical point of view. Again, answering in terms of nineteenth-century physics, he said: 'We are a bit of machinery, puppets that strut and talk and laugh till time turns the handle beneath.' But these two answers did not satisfy him. So he finally said: 'But there is one elementary inescapable answer: we are that which asks the question.'¹² This capacity to inquire and question is unique to human beings, and it needs to be assiduously cultivated.

An education system that stresses factual information over reasoning only creates products that are failures in the practical world. But mere questioning will also not serve the purpose. Questioning must spring out of a genuine interest in knowing and learning things and should be properly directed for it to be fruitful. This comes only through proper training of the mind.

The boy Narendra, later Swami Vivekananda, was fearless and strong-minded. Once he was punished by his teacher for an apparent mistake. Narendra insisted that he was right. Angered, the teacher punished him further. Narendra did not murmur. Shortly after, the teacher saw that it was he who had been in error and apologized. When Narendra's mother came to know of this incident, she encouraged him saying: 'If you are right, my boy, what does it matter? It may be unjust and unpleasant, but do what you think right, come what

may.'¹³ Narendra took this lesson to heart. Later he would often speak of his mother's inspiration: 'It was my mother who inspired me to this. Her character was a constant inspiration to my life and work' (1.516). Good *samskaras* instilled into the minds of children by parents and society through personal example are a great aid in developing and exercising discernment. The story of Nachiketa in the *Katha Upanishad* is another apt example of the influence of *samskaras* on the minds of children.

Michael was painting the life of Christ. It was one of the last scenes: Judas betrays his master with a kiss. Michael was wondering if he could ever paint Judas, for he had not come across any face that had so much obstinacy, hatred, and treachery written on it. He was not sure he would ever be able to imagine the features of a man who in spite of all the blessings he had been given would do what Judas did. After months of search his eyes chanced upon the face of a criminal that nearly matched the mental image that he had of Judas. Michael requested him to serve as a model and finished painting Judas. Michael was very satisfied with the resemblance his model had with the character in his painting. But he was shocked to know that the same person, decades before, was the model for his painting of the baby Jesus too. He felt the pinch of conscience. Though he had helped that boy monetarily, his relatives had robbed him and thrown him out.¹⁴ Had he seen to it that his help was well utilized by the boy, he could have prevented 'Jesus' from turning into 'Judas'. Bad company added to his penury, and other vices also took their toll. If the boy had had access to good upbringing and quality education in his childhood, he would have been a blessing to society.

Both Jesus and Judas are within all of us. Whom we allow to come out depends on us and the circumstances and experiences that shape us. If right from childhood proper values and education are imparted and children are taught to cultivate reasoning, they will be able to discern better as they advance in age and they will be men and women of worth. Education must aim to rouse the sense of *viveka* in the minds of students. Then, students will

be able to decide the best option to reach the goals of their choice. At the age of seventeen, Sri Ramakrishna had emphatically decided: 'I do not want to pursue a bread-winning education. I want an education that helps one manifest right knowledge and find true fulfillment in life.'¹⁵ Sri Ramakrishna's exemplary *viveka* enabled him to fix his goal clearly and chart his course accordingly. Swami Vivekananda tells us that education 'may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently.'¹⁶ Again: 'Education is not filling the mind with a lot of facts. Perfecting the instrument [mind] and getting complete mastery of one's mind [is the ideal of education]' (1.510). Also that education ought to be imparted 'by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet' (5.342). Positive thinking, right attitudes, value judgement, and such other qualities are to be actively cultivated right from childhood if we are to enrich our discerning faculties. Only an education such as this can make humans a blessing to society.

In the age of the Internet, accession and dissemination of knowledge has undergone a revolution. We have been exploring external nature from the depth of the seas to the vast recesses of interstellar space and have acquired much knowledge about the workings of the various forces of nature. Our horizons keep expanding by the day. But, paradoxically, our ability to control our emotions and impulses has not kept pace with the progress in harnessing the external forces of nature. We often do not know where and how to judiciously use our knowledge to become better human beings, to live at peace with ourselves and radiate the same around.

In the words of Bertrand Russell: 'We are in the middle of a race between human skill as to means and human folly as to ends. ... Unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow.'¹⁷ Ancient Indian rishis knew the importance of the discerning intellect and hence came out this prayer: '(May that Supreme Being) stimulate our intellects.'¹⁸ The

The idea of freedom is not an illusion, it comes from the very depths of our being, never from reason. Lower reason can only end in scepticism, because what is ordinarily called reason, can never take us to the truth; but the higher reason, the purified reason, can reveal the truth to us. It is not Kant's reason, but the highest intuitive vision that reveals the Truth directly.

Vedantic treatises such as the *Drig Drishya Viveka* are concerned with the task of developing that higher reason in us. Ours is gross reason, but that reason can be made finer and finer by going through a process of steady, prolonged purification and strict ethical culture in thought, word and deed. Philosophy is not mere empty speculation with no bearing on life. It is the pursuit of knowledge that reveals the Truth to us directly. When a person is emancipated from all bonds, when lust no longer finds any place in his mind, and when he has become truthful in character, then he attains Brahman.

In both Yoga and Advaita Vedanta, very great stress is laid on clear thinking, on not identifying oneself with the non-self, with the phenomenon. When the modifications of the mind are controlled, the Self ceases to identify itself with the non-self, or the phenomenon. Even what is called samadhi clarifies the understanding, the discriminative faculty. When a man comes down from samadhi he should be able to separate the Self from the non-self.

—Swami Yatiswarananda, *How to Seek God*, 194–5

student was initiated with this mantra on going to the Gurukula to live as a brahmacharin and undertake Vedic studies. He was to recite this mantra and meditate on its meaning. This shows how discerning wisdom was valued over knowledge and how the significance of prayer in developing this wisdom was appreciated. All the education and the experiences we gain from our interaction with the world ought to aim at gaining this discerning wisdom.

Spiritual company and study of spiritual texts help cultivate *viveka*. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'You can't understand the pulse rightly unless you live

with a physician. Moving with him constantly, you learn to distinguish between the pulse of phlegm and the pulse of bile.¹⁹

Viveka for a Meaningful Life

Viveka is as essential to spiritual life as to the secular. Spiritual life is a journey into the unknown. Unless the light of *viveka* illumines one's spiritual path, there is always the risk of losing one's way or stumbling. Examples are not wanting in Indian Itihasas and Puranas of aspirants being misled or falling from their ideal due to lack of discernment. The Upanishads declare this path to be like a razor's edge, difficult to tread.²⁰ Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly reminds us that discernment between the real and the unreal is imperative for a spiritual aspirant. The lives of saints and sages provide illuminating examples of the exercise of discerning wisdom for choosing the right path and realizing one's goals.

The *Katha Upanishad* explains the significance of *viveka* through the instructive analogy of a chariot. The human body is compared to a chariot, with the individual self as its master; knowledge is the charioteer; mind, the bridle; sense organs, the horses; and sense objects, the road. For the person with *viveka* these organs are as controllable as trained horses, and thus endowed with a controlled mind the self attains its goal: Self-knowledge, the highest reward of *viveka*. On the other hand, the person devoid of *viveka*, with an uncontrolled mind and unruly senses, much like vicious horses, never attains one's goal (1.3.3–9).

How does *viveka* help? *Viveka* enables us to keep our priorities in order, have clarity of vision, and lead a purposeful life. Instead of giving up one's individuality, blindly imitating people and following the different fads rampant in society, a discerning person can rightly apprehend the truth behind these and stick to the essentials that can lead one to the goal that makes life meaningful. Thus, only a person with discerning wisdom can claim to be the 'crown' of Creation and do justice to the biblical statement: 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea

and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move upon the earth.'²¹

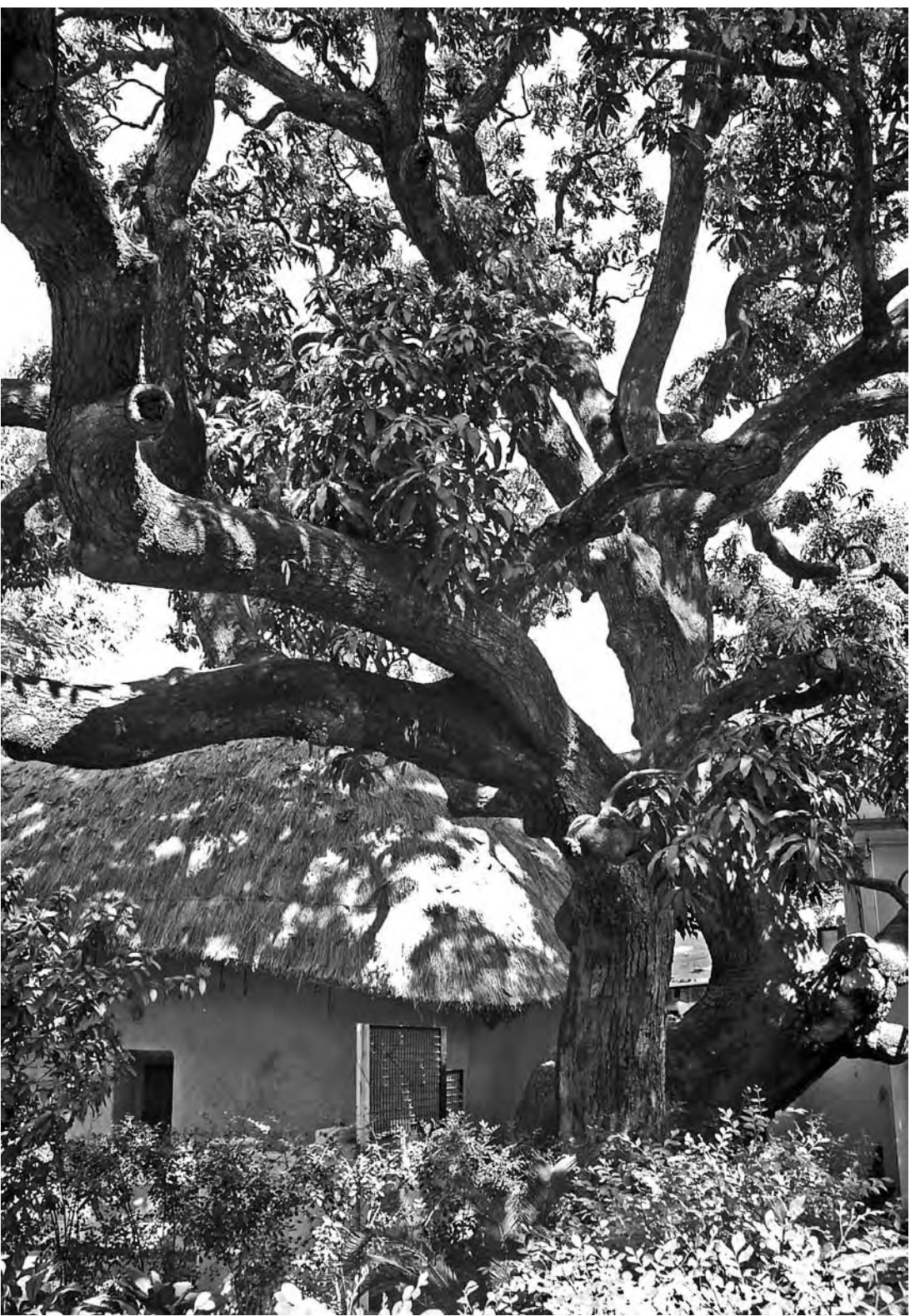


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The Ramakrishna Movement

MANGO TREE PLANTED BY SRI RAMAKRISHNA IN HIS PATERNAL HOME AT KAMARPUKUR / ADVAITA ASHRAMA ARCHIVES



Neo-Vedanta and the New World Order

Swami Atmapriyananda

THE SIMPLE MESSAGE OF VEDANTA invites us to realize the divine inner essence, of all beings: the Atman, the *purāṇa*, the immortal, immutable, incorruptible, unchanging, undecaying, eternal Self. Vedanta has therefore been called *ātmavidyā*, knowledge of the Atman. It is *adhyātma-vidyā*, spiritual knowledge, which alone is capable of liberating humans from sorrow: *Tarati śokam-ātmavit*.¹ Bhagavan avers thus in the Bhagavadgita: ‘Among all *vidyās*, I am *adhyātma-vidyā*.’² It is the unambiguous teaching of the Gita, the magnum opus of Vedanta, that *śoka* and *moha*, sorrow and delusion—which are the seeds of *samsara*, transmigratory existence—cannot be obliterated except through the realization of the Atman: *Ātmajñānāt na anyato nivṛttiḥ*.³

Vedanta: Ancient and Modern

In describing the nature of the Atman, the innermost and immortal spiritual core of every being, the Gita uses the word *purāṇa*.⁴ Commenting on this word, Shankaracharya states in his famous *bhāṣya*, commentary, that although ancient, it is yet modern: *purā api nava*. This very phrase applies equally well to Vedanta, the ‘ancient-modern’ wisdom of the Upanishads.

That which is eternal is both ancient and modern, because it is timeless. Timelessness subsumes time and the Eternal is, therefore, the source of interplay between them: between the Absolute and the relative, the Divine and the human, the One and the many. Such a teaching is truly universal and beyond space-time boundaries—Vedanta is thus the phil-

osophy, religion, and way of life of all humankind. It does not belong to any particular country, religion, or time period; it appeals across the board—to everybody, everywhere, at all times. Being the interplay of the One and the many, it possesses infinite variety in and through the unity it embodies. The basic texts of Vedanta, the Upanishads and the Gita, have often been called ‘mother’, for they symbolize unity underlying the variety of life, binding great diversity in one strong bond of universality.⁵ These Vedanta texts, the great mother of all, have been extensively read, studied, chanted, repeated, meditated, and commented upon; they have been interpreted in innumerable varieties of ways by numerous acharyas; they have been worshipped and lauded over the centuries by all members of Indian society: scholars and the so-called ignorant as well, saints and ordinary folk, monks and householders.

About the Gita, one great swami of the Ramakrishna Order⁶ once told the author: ‘The Gita is like a piece of sugarcane. Everybody can get some juice out of it. Even a child without teeth can appreciate its taste. And a great acharya with powerful teeth can crush and squeeze plenty of juice out of it.’ The beauty and grandeur of the Gita lies in its being both, *brahma-vidyā*, the science of Brahman, and *yoga-śāstra*, the technology to realize this science. The colophon at the end of each chapter has four significant components, stating that the Gita is: (i) *brahma-vidyā*; (ii) *yoga-śāstra*; (iii) a dialogue between *nara*, the human, and *nara-sakhā*, the Divine as a friend of humans; and (iv) yoga throughout, starting from *viśāda-yoga* and ending with *mokṣa-yoga*. From despondency to liberation, the whole spectrum of human aspiration, endeavour, and enterprise in any situation—indeed the entire human life itself—is one continuous state of yoga.

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Human understanding is metamorphosed into divine wisdom by the knowledge that life itself is one unbroken continuum of yoga. And interestingly, the intuitive faculty that opens up the floodgates to this integral new vision of light and truth is also yoga—the Gita calls it *buddhi-yoga*.⁷ This, in essence, is the core of the Vedantic teaching.

Three Principles of Neo-Vedanta

One of the latest acharyas to have interpreted and infused new life into Vedanta texts was Swami Vivekananda—who was naught but ‘his Master’s voice’. His interpretation of Vedanta is in effect a rejuvenation of the ancient texts, and is often called the ‘Neo-Vedanta of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda’. We need to examine this phrase to find out what, if anything, is new in this ‘Neo-Vedanta’. In order to do this, we need to ask: What exactly did Swami Vivekananda teach? He himself said: ‘I have a message, and I will give it after my own fashion.’⁸ What was the message he gave?

Any search for an answer to this question should be made not so much by way of an intellectual exercise as through a process of reverential meditation. At best, the intellect can analyse and synthesize. But analysis is paralysis. It is a mere verbal exercise that paralyzes the higher human intuitive faculties. A spiritual personality can never be understood through verbal means; spirituality transcends ‘verbality’ and intellection, and trying to catch it in the net of intellectualism is like ‘searching for the footprints of birds flying through the sky’, as Vedanta books would say. The Truth should be realized through enlightened awareness, *samyag-jñānena*⁹, by blending the faculties of head and heart, *hrdā manīṣā manasā bhikṛpto*¹⁰, and by stilling the mind in the heart, *mano hrdi niruddhya ca*.¹¹

Swami Vivekananda’s message of Vedanta is based on the following foundational principles: (i) divinity of the human being; (ii) unity of all existence, solidarity of the universe; and as a corollary to these (iii) the essential spirituality of life.

In a remarkable spiritual experience that he had at Almora, in the lap of the Himalayas, Swamiji

realized the identity of the microcosm with the macrocosm—the two spheres in which Truth reveals itself.¹² According to Vedanta, there is but one unbroken, homogenous Existence, *sat*, which is of the nature of pure Awareness, *cit*. It is also described as *ānandaghana*, one unbroken mass of joy. Thus, the nearest verbal description of this Reality that Vedanta has come to is *sat-cit-ānanda*, Existence-Awareness-Bliss Absolute. Now, in trying to understand the principles enunciated above, we can see that Principle 1 describes the real nature of Existence in its microcosmic dimension and Principle 2 asserts the identity of the microcosm with the macrocosm. Taken together, these lead naturally to Principle 3, that all life, in its microcosmic and macrocosmic aspects, is divine. These principles form the core of Neo-Vedanta.

What Is New in Neo-Vedanta?

Although the term ‘neo-Vedanta’ has gained currency, there are not scholars wanting who question the use of the prefix ‘neo-’ before Vedanta. Their point of view is that ‘neo-’ smacks of a departure from the Vedanta tradition *per se*, a tradition handed down over the millennia via an army of illumined acharyas. They argue that it is perhaps better to say that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda reinterpreted, rejuvenated, and revitalized the eternal message of Vedanta, making it a living force in the modern world. The adoption of the prefix ‘neo-’ is perhaps misleading, for it would mean that Ramakrishna-Vivekananda added something *new* to the eternal Vedanta. The question now is: Is it true that they did? And if so, can this claim be justified?

This question, if taken up in the plane of intellection and philosophy, could be endlessly debated—with thoughtful minds on either side holding forth and giving out powerful arguments in support of their points of view. Perhaps it would be wiser to go by what Swamiji himself has to say on the matter: ‘What Ramakrishna Paramahansa and I have added to this [traditional Hindu and Buddhist teachings] is, that the Many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the same mind at

different times and in different attitudes.¹³

The whole problem of existence in philosophy concerns the One and the many. We do perceive the many—it is a fact of daily experience. But there is always the attempt by the human mind—in everyday life as well as in scientific discourse—to seek the One, of which the many could be considered the various manifestations. Although the many is experienced daily, it is an experience of the *senses*. Beyond the senses, when the senses are inoperative, the experience of the many ceases and is replaced by that of the One. In fact, the experience of the One is equally a fact of daily experience—in the state of deep, dreamless sleep.

On the question of the One and the many, Vedānta has two predominant views: (i) the One alone is real, and the many is only its apparent manifestation; and (ii) the One transforms into the many, without undergoing any change itself. These two schools of thought are the Advaita and the Bhedābheda, of which the most prominent protagonists have been Shankara and Ramanuja respectively. These two philosophical views are related to the two major proclivities of the human mind: idealism and realism. The ultra-Advaitic view of *ajāta-vāda* is pure subjective idealism suggestive of solipsism, while the Vishishtadvaita view—one variety of *bhedābheda*, difference in non-difference—suits minds inclined to realism. It is when one asks which point of view is *the* correct one or, less aggressively, which is *more* correct, that we have the real problem! Sri Ramakrishna would simply tell us that this question cannot be asked with regard to Reality.

Neo-Vedānta and the Theory of Relativity

Two great developments in physics which revolutionized not only our outlook on space-time-matter but also our world view, *Weltanschauung*, took place in the early years of the twentieth century: Einstein's relativity theory and Planck's quantum theory. A huge paradigm shift occurred in science thanks to these two discoveries, and that had a profound impact on our philosophical thinking. Interestingly, hardly a couple of decades before

these discoveries took place Sri Ramakrishna, in an unknown corner of Dakshineswar, near Calcutta, had been realizing these very paradigms in an entirely different sphere through his experiments in the inner world of spirit and consciousness. The saga of these parallel developments is a fascinating story that we will now attempt to narrate.

From Absolutely Right to Relatively Right • The essence of the relativity theory is that nature does not have any *preferred* frame of reference—all physical laws remain the same irrespective of the observational criteria. This has thrown up the new *Weltanschauung* that, philosophically speaking, nature is *impartial*—for it chooses to treat all frames of reference on an equal footing. This new world view, if applied to religion and philosophy, would set at rest, scientifically, the '*my* frame versus *your* frame' quarrel that is at the root of all fanaticism and bigotry. That a moving rod contracts in the direction of its motion is the well-known phenomenon of FitzGerald-Lorentz contraction used in the special theory of relativity. If a six-footer appears to be three feet tall in one frame and five in another, it is meaningless to ask which of these frames gives the 'right' answer. As Eddington says in his famous book *The Nature of the Physical World*, we are all anxious to affix the label 'right' to a particular frame of reference to the exclusion of all others—but on careful scrutiny we find that what we are anxious to affix is after all a blank label!¹⁴ It is a blank label, for the concept of 'rightness' in this context simply does not exist. Applied to religion and philosophy this notion would mean that the various frames of reference in human thought, in which Reality appears in various hues, are indistinguishable from one another; so much so that it is futile to ask which one of them is right. Each of them is as right as the others—that is, none of them could claim to be *the* right one, to the falsity of the others; none of them is absolutely right, but each of them is relatively right.

The simple Indian parable of the blind men and the elephant is a story that aptly illustrates this scientific truth. Several blind men wanted to get a feel of an elephant. One of them touched the trunk and

said that the elephant was like a stout rope. Another touched an ear and declared that the elephant was like a huge fan. Another who touched a leg asserted that the elephant was like a big pillar. Each of them claimed that his perception was the only right one and of course nobody's experience tallied with that of the others. A big quarrel ensued. Finally a person with full vision came upon the scene and asked the blind men what the matter was. He smilingly listened to each man's description of the elephant and told them that they were all right. 'But if one is right, how can the others also be right?' they argued. The man with vision laughed and said that while each of the blind men was right, none of them was *absolutely* right; each of them was only *relatively* right. The mistake they made was to affix the label of 'rightness' to their own frame of perception to the exclusion of all the others.

Sri Ramakrishna tells a similar parable about the colour of a chameleon in a tree. One person claimed it was yellow, another that it was red, a third that it was jet black, and so on. The person who habitually used to sit under the tree said: 'Look, I sit under this tree and I know the creature in and out. It is true that it is yellow, equally true that it is red, also that it is black and many other colours besides. What is more, sometimes it is colourless. It is called a chameleon and it can take different colours at different times. While each one of your perceptions is right, none of them is absolutely right—each is only relatively right.' Kamalakanta, the famous poet of Bengal, whose songs Sri Ramakrishna was so fond of singing, says:

Is my Mother Shyama [Kali] really black? ...
At times she is white, at times yellow,
at still other times blue or red. ...
At times she is Purusha, at times Prakriti,
and again at times the formless Void.
Contemplating these forms of the Mother,
Kamakanta is easily left flabbergasted.

This means the 'logical' mind gets baffled and stilled, and thereupon catapulted to a supra-logical realm in which it realizes the impossibility of dis-

tinguishing between one type of vision stationed in one particular frame of reference and another vision seen from a different frame. To say which one is real is in fact as unscientific as it is illogical. When the so-called logical mind is forced into seeing and accepting the equal rightness of *all* frames, of *all* points of view, of *all* world views concerning Reality—which its pride masquerading as logicity initially refuses to see—then something spectacular happens: its pride of logicity crushed, it collapses through the realization of its own illogicality and dies a spontaneous death.

A remarkable illustration of this phenomenon is seen when Mahendranath Gupta, the author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, hears from Sri Ramakrishna at their very first meeting that God is both with form and without form. This phenomenon of 'mind collapse', the mind becoming mind-less or no-mind, is called *amanibhāva* in Vedanta and is the *sine qua non* of all spiritual realization. In the cremation ground where this logical mind is burnt to ashes is born 'no-mind'—a new mind that transcends logic without contradicting it. Being neither logical nor illogical, it is 'alogical' and therefore 'mystical', in the sense that it is realizable only through supersensory perception that is 'direct and immediate'—*sākṣāt aparokṣāt*.¹⁵ Swami Tapasyananda once told the author that Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy is thus *alogical mysticism*.¹⁶

Neo-Vedanta and the Quantum Theory

From Either-or to Both-and · When Max Planck discovered the quantum nature of radiation and found that the quanta were 'particles', nothing but bundles of energy—the energy of each quantum being proportional to the frequency of radiation—he would hardly have imagined that he was initiating a scientific revolution that would have far-reaching impact on the philosophical world view being forged in the fire of science-philosophy interaction. The fact of bundles of energy being proportional to their frequency of radiation presented a peculiar marriage of the particle concept with the wave concept. This immediately triggered another

line of thought: if radiation—which is familiarly conceived as waves—shared particle characteristics, why should not a particle possess wave characteristics? Considering on the one hand the basic philosophical premise that nature is ‘symmetric’ because it is ‘beautiful’, *sundara*, and on the other hand the fact that matter and radiation are nature’s twin children, it follows from both the aesthetic and scientific points of view that radiation having wave characteristics should naturally imply that particles also have wave characteristics. This led to de Broglie’s famous discovery of the wave nature of matter, which literally opened the floodgates; discovery after discovery followed—Schrödinger’s wave mechanics, Heisenberg’s quantum mechanics and the uncertainty principle, relativistic quantum mechanics, quantum field theory, and so on. Perhaps the most outstanding discovery amidst all these was the ‘particle-wave’, whose philosophical principle was stated by Schrödinger himself in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech: The ‘either-or’ paradigm of classical physics has been replaced by the ‘both-and’ paradigm.

A couple of decades prior to this, Sri Ramakrishna had made a similar discovery in the realm of religion and philosophy, stating in unambiguous terms that God is both *sākāra*, with form, and *nirākāra*, without form. He is both *saguṇa*, with qualities, and *nirguṇa*, without qualities. He is both *savišeṣa*, with attributes, and *nirvišeṣa*, without attributes. He is not *either* this *or* that, but is *both* this *and* that. The ‘either-or’ paradigm of the older religions and philosophies was replaced by the ‘both-and’ paradigm in Neo-Vedanta.

From Satya-mithyā to Nitya-lilā

Advaita Vedanta, as expounded by Shankaracharya, asserts that the pure Existence-Awareness, *saccinmātra-svarūpa*, called Brahman is the only Reality: the world of name and form, *nāma-rūpa-prapañca*, is but an ‘appearance’. When a rope is wrongly perceived as a snake in twilight, the snake is merely an appearance and the rope alone is the reality. Suppose you got frightened on ‘seeing’ the snake and suffered a heart attack. Realizing later

on that it was only a rope that ‘appeared’ as a snake, you try to sue it for causing you serious physical and mental discomfiture. If in court the judge were to ask the rope, ‘Why did you appear as a snake and cause this damage?’, the rope would reply with all innocence: ‘Sir, I *never* appeared as a snake!’ The judge would then ask the rope: ‘If you never appeared as a snake, why is it that this person *saw* you appear as a snake?’ The rope would obviously chuckle and say: ‘Well Sir, that this gentleman confused an “appearance” with “existence” is none of my business!’ If Brahman were to be hauled up in court and questioned, ‘Why do you appear as the world?’, it would smile—at our stupidity, *moha*—and reply: ‘I never appeared, never am appearing, never will appear as the world. That you see the world-appearance and imagine I am appearing as the world and ask this foolish question by mixing up an appearance with Existence or Reality—*satyānrte mithunīkṛtya*¹⁷—is none of my business. Sorry for you, dear fellow. Wake up, wake up from your dream, from your delusion! Arise, awake—*uttiṣṭhata jāgrata!*’

Now comes the philosophical question: Is the appearance true? The immediate reply is: Of course, yes; don’t you perceive it vividly? How can you deny something that you clearly perceive? But again, you ask the deeper question: Is the appearance ‘really’ true? Which means: If there were no appearance at all, would there still be a reality, an existence apart from the appearance? In this case the appearance is not ‘really’ true after all, for there *is* an independent Existence apart from it. So what is the status of the appearance? It is both true and untrue; true because it is perceived, untrue because there is an Existence apart from and independent of it, and Existence *is* even when the appearance *is not*. We have thus caught ourselves in a curious kind of knot, as it were. It is a consciousness-and-matter knot, *cit-jada-granthi*. This peculiar nature of empirical knowledge—that it is both true and untrue—has been termed by Shankaracharya and other Vedantins as *mithyā*, *māyā*, or *avidyā*. The world-appearance is *mithyā*, false, in this sense; the only Reality, *satya*, is Brahman. The famous dictum attributed to Shankara-



charya, '*Brahma satyaṁ jaganmithyā jīva brahmaiva nāpara*'; Brahman is true, the world false, and the individual self is none other than Brahman,' succinctly summarizes his position on Advaita Vedanta.

The following question arises next: Does not the world-appearance that is described as *mithyā* have Brahman as its substratum? When the water of the ocean breaks into waves, the wave name-form has water alone as its substratum. When clay is moulded into various types of dolls, the doll name-form has clay alone as its substratum. The doll 'as appearance through name and form' is *mithyā* in the sense described above; but doll 'as clay' is only the clay in itself, without its 'doll-ness'. Similarly, the world-appearance as name-form is *mithyā* in Shankara's parlance, but the world 'as Brahman'—not appearing as anything—is the Reality.

One may thus think of two aspects of Brahman: the 'appearing' Brahman and the 'non-appearing' Brahman. The non-appearing Brahman is transcendental, beyond all sense-perception—*aśabdām*, *asparśam*, *arūpam*. There is no question of 'perceiving' this Brahman, for all perception is of the

appearance only. This being so, Brahman would eternally remain unrealized and unrealizable. But then, when one penetrates beyond the realm of name and form through the extremely subtle power of *buddhi*, discriminative intellect, this same transcendent Brahman is realized through its world-appearance: *dṛśyate tvagryayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣma-darśibhiḥ*.¹⁸ Thus, when the world-appearance is perceived, it is actually Brahman that is intuited in and through the appearance. Brahman 'peeps' as it were through the appearance, which thus provides a 'window' through which Brahman can be perceived—that is, intuited by the refined and purified intellect, also called *prajñā*, *medhā*, or *dhi*. The appearance therefore need not be dismissed as *mithyā*, as it was by Shankaracharya, but can be regarded as that aspect of the supreme Truth through which one is enabled to catch a glimpse of its transcendental nature, otherwise unrealizable by the ordinary mind and the senses. Hence, the *mithyā* status of the appearance may be honourably replaced by something that connotes this aspect as the 'revealer' of Brahman. As the *Kena Upanishad*

states: ‘*Pratibodha-viditam matam*; Brahman is realized in and through each and every experience.’¹⁹

Sri Ramakrishna introduced the word *lilā*, divine play, to denote the *mithyā* aspect of appearance. Correspondingly, the *satya* that is Brahman, Sri Ramakrishna called the *nitya*. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna replaced the *satya-mithyā* paradigm of traditional Vedanta by the *nitya-lilā* paradigm of Neo-Vedanta. The water in the ocean is the *nitya* aspect, and the waves the *lilā* aspect. It is the water alone that one intuits through the waves, and again the wave-appearance has water alone as its substratum. The *nitya* and the *lilā* are non-different in this sense. The clay doll that Shankaracharya would call *mithyā* is no longer *mithyā* when seen as non-different from the clay substratum: in the new paradigm of Neo-Vedanta its status would be *lilā*. Thus, the status of the clay substratum and that of the doll-appearance, *satya* and *mithyā* in the old paradigm, is now being redefined in the Neo-Vedanta paradigm as *nitya* and *lilā*. The transcendental supreme Brahman, formless and absolute—*nitya*—is capable of becoming relative, breaking forth into innumerable forms—*lilā*. The Transcendent appears as the Immanent. Truth is one as well as many—transcendentally it is one, as immanent it appears as many. We may recall the paradigm shift of quantum mechanics from ‘either-or’ to ‘both-and’. Nothing is rejected. Everything is subsumed in the one supreme Unity, in the one infinite Reality which is Transcendent-Immanent, Impersonal-Personal—*nirākāra-sākāra*, *nirguṇa-guṇamaya*, *nirañjananararūpadhara*—in one word, *nitya-lilā*. This is the new paradigm shift of Neo-Vedanta.

(To be concluded)

Notes and References

1. ‘A knower of Self goes beyond sorrow’; *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 7.1.3.
2. Bhagavadgita, 10.32.
3. Shankaracharya’s commentary on Gita, 2.11.
4. See Gita, 2.20.
5. See ‘Gita Dhyana’; Shankaracharya’s commentary on *Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.14.
6. Swami Tapasyananda, who was the vice president of the Ramakrishna Order and was venerated as a great scholar-saint.
7. Gita, 10.10; 18.57.
8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 5.72.
9. *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.1.5.
10. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.3.9.
11. Gita, 8.12.
12. See His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 1.250.
13. *Complete Works*, 8.261.
14. See Arthur S Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2005), 20.
15. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.4.1, 2; 3.5.1.
16. For a detailed discussion on Sri Ramakrishna’s philosophy seen in the light of Einstein’s relativity theory, see the author’s article ‘Ramakrishna and Relativity’ included as an appendix in Swami Tapasyananda, *Bhakti Schools of Vedanta* (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2003), 342–58.
17. Shankaracharya’s introduction to his commentary on *Brahma Sutra*.
18. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.3.12.
19. *Kena Upanishad*, 2.4.

When I experienced that the world, with all moving creatures, was entirely separate from me, like a ball, or like the planet Mars in the sky, I had no body consciousness, and I felt that I had no connection whatsoever with this world—neither had I any connection with it in the past, nor have I now, nor will I have in the future. And I found others also to be contained in the divine Atman, and thought: ‘If only these people could know about it!’ I found no desire in me—complete desirelessness. But still I had the idea of many Atmans. I didn’t have that idea of Oneness, One in all.

Hari Maharaj [Swami Turiyananda] told me: ‘First one has to know oneself; then one can know others to be the same.’

Illumination comes suddenly, quickly. How and when, it cannot be said. When I learned bicycling, at first I couldn’t maintain my balance. The teacher told me: ‘Don’t look at the wheel; look straight ahead.’ Then suddenly it was all right. So you see, a teacher is needed. The knack comes suddenly.

—Swami Atulananda, *Atman Alone Abides*, 27

A Western Vedanta Tradition?

Swami Atmarupananda

I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO WRITE on the Vedanta tradition in the West, but we must first decide if such a thing exists. Vedanta in the West, yes, but a tradition? That implies at least two things. First, there must be something at least minimally cohesive that we can point to as ‘Western Vedanta,’ something more than just ‘Vedanta teachings given in the West.’ Second, tradition implies that this identifiable body of teachings has had some continuity through time. In other words, the fact that many teachers from different traditions have taught Vedanta in the West for more than a century doesn’t in itself constitute a Western tradition.

Vedantic influence has had some recognizable presence in the West since the time of Schopenhauer (1788–1860) in Europe and the Transcendentalists, sometimes dated from 1836, in America.¹ But this also doesn’t constitute a living tradition. It represents interest and influence.

At the time of Swami Vivekananda’s sojourn in the West, however, an incipient Vedantic tradition was seeded in the West. One could, in fact, date the beginning precisely to late 1894, when the swami said in answer to a question, ‘I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East.’² At that point he was no longer in America just to raise money for his work in India: he was there to give a message, to initiate a tradition.

Before returning to Swami Vivekananda it would be good to recognize that since his time there have been many other teachers of Vedanta, from many different traditions, that have taught in the West. There is found everything from the Bengal

Vaishnava tradition of ISKCON to the Advaita Vedanta of Sri Ramana Maharshi’s followers. To make a ‘Western Vedanta tradition’ out of this rich mix is impossible. Therefore, we should perhaps limit ourselves to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition.

Even here the task is not easy, as we have a great deal of diversity within this one tradition: from the impersonal emphasis of Swami Ashokananda to the devotional and ritualistic accent of Swami Prabhavananda, from the scholarly emphasis of Swami Satprakashananda to the emphasis on karma yoga by others.

Where in all this do we find a tradition? Or should we look for a plurality of traditions? The thesis of this article is as follows: a genuine Western tradition of Vedanta is in the process of being formed. It is still fluid, immature, not yet defined. Many and diverse elements are going into its formation. Hopefully its mature form will also be diverse, multi-formed, rich, making room for all sorts of people of varying temperaments and levels of development. But it will, I think, be a Vedanta tradition that is recognizably Western. The rest of this article is not descriptive, but predictive, attempting to foresee the general shape of what is to come.

Two Ideas Critical to the Spread of Vedanta beyond India

Swami Vivekananda saw in the teachings of Vedanta a much-needed spiritual foundation for the emerging modern world. He also saw the harm which missionary religions had caused in the past, often unintentionally. To make of Vedanta a religion that would spread of its own inherent appeal, enhancing civilizations rather than conquering them, he honed two principles that were critical to his teaching beyond India.

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First, the swami held that every nation has an ideal which is its life, its purpose for being. As he says in 'Women of India':

[Each nation] represents a great ideal; towards that it is moving. And, therefore, it is rightly assumed that to understand a nation you must first understand its ideal, for each nation refuses to be judged by any other standard than its own. ... [Different countries develop] through such different ideas that to judge one people by the other's standard would be neither just nor practicable. Therefore we must know what the ideal is that a nation has raised before itself (8.55–6).

This is perhaps the swami's greatest single contribution to social thought: that the life of each nation is an ideal, which is its very purpose for existence, and losing which it dies. This idea he repeated often, giving the example of India, whose ideal was God or the realization of God. Because India as a whole had never strayed from that ideal, he would say, she had weathered every storm, every threat to her existence, while other nations had been born and were subsequently destroyed. Understanding this principle is the key to finding the seeds of a Western Vedanta tradition. Let us hold this idea in mind a moment while we examine another key idea of Swami Vivekananda's.

The swami also said:

To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The dry, abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogism must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work. The Lord only knows how far I shall succeed (5.104–5).

Why was this at the heart of his life's work? Why so important? It is primarily important if Vedanta is to be a global force. The religions of the world are largely mythological in their thinking. Even when they tie their origins to historical occurrences, the interpretation of those occurrences is mythological. And the power generated from those occurrences comes from that mythological interpretation, not from the bare historical fact. It isn't the *fact* that a Jew named Jesus was born in Bethlehem that is important, it's the significance of that birth that's important. It isn't the fact that a black meteorite lies in the city of Mecca that's important, it's the significance of the Kaaba that inspires Muslims. It isn't the fact that a brahmana priest named Ramakrishna lived at Dakshineswar that's important, it's the meaning of his life that's important.

But mythology is not universal. A myth's meaning is seen only by those who are sensitive to its symbolic world and its presuppositions. The Kaaba is not sacred to a Christian. The Eucharist is not a sacrament to the Muslim. Ganesha is not a sacred image to a Jew. Each civilization has its own myths, tied to its culture and values, its history and geography. Principles, however, are universal. The principle of gravity might have been discovered by Newton in seventeenth-century England, but there is nothing English about the principle: it works just as well in Japan and on the moon and on Jupiter.

Swami Vivekananda saw that the Upanishads were interested in principles, not in stories, not in myths, and as such they presented a religion based on principles. He therefore sought to extract those principles from the Vedanta, seeing that they had great meaning for the world and knowing that only principles could find application everywhere in the world. He had seen first hand the damage done by missionary religions that remained tied to a mythology and culture as they spread. Unable to distinguish between universal principles and cultural myths, such missionary traditions destroyed whole cultures in the wake of their expansion.

Tying these two ideas together—this valuing of universal principles on the one hand and his

view that each nation had its own ideal that was its reason for existence on the other—we come to the heart of his method of teaching. He presented Vedanta as a religion of universal principles, untied from the great and beautiful cultural expressions they had found in India throughout the ages; principles that could be assimilated in any culture without doing that culture violence, principles that could be harmonized with each nation's ideal.

Respect for Each Culture

Thus we come to the central principle observed by the swami as he established Vedanta in the West: respect for the integrity of each culture. He went so far as to say: 'Never forget that a man is made great and perfect as much by his faults as by his virtues. So we must not seek to rob a nation of its character, even if it could be proved that the character was all faults' (8.269). This respect for the integrity of each culture will in time form a distinguishing feature of the Vedanta tradition in the West. American Vedanta will look different from the traditional Vedanta of India, and will likewise look different from the Vedanta of France or China or Zambia.

From this central principle, several ideas follow. First, in order to understand a culture's values and ideals we need to familiarize ourselves with its history, its struggles, its ethos. Swami Vivekananda did that, and others have as well. When Swami Shraddhananda was selected to go from India to San Francisco in the 1950s, Swami Ajayananda—who had himself worked in America—told him to study Abraham Lincoln if he wanted to understand the Americans. Swami Shraddhananda did so, and became a student and devotee of Lincoln, giving lectures on him, maintaining a library on him, using anecdotes from his life to illustrate spiritual ideas.

Swami Ashokananda, who was head of the San Francisco centre when Swami Shraddhananda arrived, asked his new assistant to learn some manual skill, '... otherwise the American monks won't re-

spect you.' And so, Swami Shraddhananda used to laughingly say, 'I became a grease monkey', meaning a mechanic who serviced the cars and trucks at the Olema retreat.

In his advice Swami Ajayananda recognized that the best ideals of America could be gleaned from a study of Abraham Lincoln's life and times, since the latter had struggled to understand those very ideals, struggled to find how they could be realized. And in his advice, Swami Ashokananda recognized the American respect for labour. This is a peculiarly American quality, not found to the same degree in Europe or elsewhere. In America, the person who actually does the work is respected more than the person who supervises or manages, whatever the work might be.

One might object, of course, that respect is only part of the story, as no one excoriated the West, including America, so strongly as Swami Vivekananda. And that is true. However, his scoldings flowed from a broader and more basic love, sympathy, and respect. Had they not, they would have had the effect of insults, and no one reacts favourably to insults.

Swami Vivekananda recognized that, as India's ideal was God, America's ideal was democracy. It would be hard to study America without coming to this conclusion. Not every Indian struggles for God, and not every American lives up to democratic ideals, the majority don't in both cases; but in each country the life force of the civilization is invested in struggling for its ideal, in manifesting its ideal, through trials and errors, through successes and failures.

American Vedanta will in time visibly reflect this struggle for democracy, an ideal which Swami Vivekananda found to be, at its core, Vedantic. The democratic institutions of America, the democratic processes, and most of all the democratic ethos of the people—all will be enlivened and spiritualized by recognizing a Vedantic foundation. The tradition of Vedanta in America will itself be coloured by this struggle to assimilate a Vedantic foundation under the ideal of democracy.

Specific Differences of Expression

How does this difference work itself out? In many ways; but let's take a simple concrete example. In traditional India the respect for spirituality is great, and that is reflected in the respect shown for the ideal of *sannyasa*, renunciation, which in turn expresses itself in the respect shown to *sannyasins* themselves. Combine that with the wonderful tradition of hospitality in India, which includes honouring the status of a guest, and *sannyasins* are shown great deference by devotees. If they are invited for food, they are given preferential seating, and may be given special plates and bowls and tumblers, and perhaps some extra delicacies that aren't available to all. This is a wonderful tradition that works in India because all understand what is behind it. As an Indian *sannyasin* told me when I was new in the Order, referring to a swami whom he considered fallen: 'I will be the first to bow and take the dust of his feet, because of the robe.' That is, he would be saluting an ideal, not a person—a beautiful lesson I've never forgotten.

In America, however, the special status shown to a *sannyasin* can, if overdone, go against the country's ideal of democracy. It isn't that one country's custom is right and another's wrong, it's that what works in one country doesn't work in another. The separating out of certain people and giving them preferential treatment in recognition of their status is something that works against the deep-seated instincts of an American. Yes, even in American society there are examples of preferential treatment, of course, but unless it is very muted and balanced by a nod to egalitarian values, it offends. And yes, Americans need to learn a spirit of personal service, but again, in tune with its own ideal.

France, similarly, is a democratic country, with deep roots of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, but how different the culture! In France, the ideal of *raison*, reason, is held high—much more so than in America. An aesthetic sense is not a nicety for the French but is a part of being fully human, and the French aesthetic is very different from that of the Japanese, for example. A French tradition of Ved-

anta will, when it matures, express the best of what being French means.

These projected differences will not be differences in the principles, but differences in the expression of those principles, including a distinct evaluation of these principles. Swami Vivekananda recognized that different cultures value principles differently. In India, personal purity is of central importance—guiding morality, etiquette, and all aspects of behaviour. Everything else is organized around this concept of personal purity. In the West, truthfulness and honesty are the central virtues, held much higher than personal purity. Both sets of values are important in spiritual life. The West needs to learn a greater sense of personal purity, and India similarly has room to learn certain values from the West, but a difference in relative valuing will probably remain, distinguishing the cultures and impacting the tradition of Vedanta in each.

And such differences are good. A species is in danger of extinction if its gene pool becomes too small. Internal diversity is needed for the health of the species. External diversity is also needed; that is, many different species are needed for the health of the whole web of life. Similarly, different languages are needed for the health of language itself. Different cultures are needed for the health of culture itself. Differences of thought are necessary, as Swami Vivekananda loved to point out, for the health of thinking itself: it is the clash of different ideas that stimulates thought. And differences in the national expressions of Vedanta will be healthy for Vedanta as well. Uniformity is not unity. In fact, the Western experience has been that enforced uniformity is a sure way to divide, to destroy unity. Unity comes by recognizing commonality—universals—underlying diversity of expression.

What are some other distinctive elements of a Western Vedanta that we can predict? One element that has been visible from the beginning—though not always understood and appreciated—comes from the West's intellectual history. Until modern times religion in the West had a strong element of dogmatism supported by formal ecclesiastical au-

thority. Every step of intellectual freedom in science and philosophy and the humanities was gained by struggling against this religious dogma and church authority. This centuries-long struggle for intellectual freedom still influences Western thought and behaviour. For example, to question a teacher, even to disagree or to argue, is not a sign of disrespect in the West, as long as the arguing is kept within certain bounds of civility. This is seen as a legitimate part of the process of coming to terms with ideas, testing them, understanding them, trying them out.

This can be a shock to the Indian spiritual teacher who is new to the West. In India there is a natural respect for the teacher, a greater respect for social order, for seniority and position. People in India often learn from a spiritual teacher more by observation and osmosis, by which I mean listening and absorbing rather than wrestling with the teacher's ideas. Yes, the Indian devotee may question also, but not so directly as is common in the West—a directness which is perceived by many Indians new to the West as challenging the authority of the teacher.

Similarly, 'the Vedas say' or 'the Gita says' or even 'Sri Ramakrishna says' is not an automatic argument-closer for the Westerner. 'The Bible says,' or 'the Church says,' was used too often in the past for Westerners to accept an equivalent. Is what you say true? Can it be tested? Or is it superstition? Is it just a belief with nothing to back it up? To the average Westerner, these are important questions and have nothing to do with challenging the authority of the speaker or disparaging the tradition. Yes, there are many, many Westerners who are obnoxiously aggressive and who argue just because they like to argue, and who don't really want to find the truth because it is more fun to be cynical. There's nothing good about that, nor does it do any good to entertain such people's dishonest negativity. But here we are talking about sincere students who are being intellectually honest.

Experience and Assimilation

In the Vedanta tradition the traditional test for the

validity of an idea or experience is threefold: *shruti*, *yukti*, and *anubhava*—scripture, reason, and experience. Is the idea supported by scripture? Is it reasonable? And is it based on replicable experience? For the Westerner, the last two tests are not a problem, but the relationship to scripture is different from that typically found in a practising Hindu. Thus, we see a distinction between Swami Vivekananda's statements about scripture in the West and his statements in India, because he recognized this difference. In the West he would emphasize that 'by the Vedas no books are meant' (1.6) and that 'all knowledge is Veda' (8.136). Such statements make an immediate appeal to the Westerner. Not that Indians don't understand or appreciate these statements, but there is a difference, I think, in the way such statements are understood and appreciated and evaluated, a difference that is clearly visible, a difference caused by very different histories, and a difference that will colour the developing tradition of Western Vedanta.

The Vedanta tradition in the West will necessarily have a different relationship to scripture and tradition, a different dynamic between teacher and disciple. None of this indicates that one is good and the other bad. The histories of the West and of India are so distinct that such differences become inevitable.

Another difference will be seen in the manner of worship, the place and nature of temples, the importance of congregational worship. For more than thirty years Hindu temples have been appearing in American cities, first as a rare phenomenon close to large metropolitan areas, now frequently even in more conservative parts of the country. Some are simple, existing in a former family home, purchased and converted to temple use by the Hindu community. Some are very large, ornate, and constructed specifically as a Hindu temple. Sometimes artisans are even brought from India to do stone or plaster work and other ornamentation. There are South Indian style temples and North Indian style temples, there are temples dedicated to specific deities. And there are community temples that try to serve the needs of Hindus from all parts of India.

These temples serve a great need in America and in Europe, though I'll speak specifically of America, since that is what I know first hand. They attract the Indian immigrant community, and provide a place for worship, for blessings, for sacraments like sacred thread investiture and marriage. They often serve as a place where the children of immigrants born in the US can learn about their culture, perhaps learn their parents' native language in a more formal way than at home. And so these temples serve not just as shrines to deities in the traditional Indian sense, but more as Hindu 'churches' in the American sense. Yes, American, because in this regard an American church is quite different from a European church. In America, churches are centres of social life, going far beyond religious services, and so the Hindu temples in America serve a similar need for immigrant Hindus.

However, looking into the future, what is the place of these temples? My own prediction is that the important function they serve now won't last. Children of Indian immigrant parents who are born in America are Americans. American culture is much more aggressive than European cultures, since America is a land of immigrants; everyone born here is as American as I am. The tendency in American culture has been towards assimilation, and it is the same for the children of Indian immigrants. The second generation of Indian children born here are usually distinguishable only by their coloration. The huge wave of Indian immigration of the last forty years can't last, and all signs are that it has already waned significantly. Jobs and opportunities are opening up in India. People are coming to America more and more for a short-term purpose, and then returning to India. In fifty years, I think the era of building traditional Hindu temples will be only of historical interest.

Just as Jewish practice has been deeply affected by its long association with its rebel child Christianity, so Hindu practice in America will in time be deeply influenced by this association. It already has been, as can be seen in our Vedanta societies, where there is a congregational service on Sunday

mornings. An offering plate for donations is typically passed around at these services, and there is often Sunday school for the kids. There is week-night 'Bible' study, in the form of Vedanta scriptural classes. The decorum observed in the Vedanta societies is more the decorum of a church than that of a Hindu temple, where talking or coming and going during worship is natural, and where children are allowed to play. People put on their 'church behaviour' when entering the shrine.

Much more could be said about the way 'congregational' Vedanta is changing and will continue to change as it adapts to the West. In interests of space, let me mention, without details, three other areas of change that seem likely.

First, there is no good provision for American Vedantins who want a marriage sanctioned and consecrated by their tradition, since sannyasins don't perform weddings and there are no Vedanta priests. This will in time have to be rectified in a way that doesn't compromise the institution of sannyasa.

Second, public pujas are likely to become more congregational, involving the congregation more than pujas in India, again because of the pattern set by Christianity and Judaism. Along with that, the symbolism involved in ritual worship will have to become more transparent to the Western mind than the symbols which are appropriate to Indian life and culture, so that the worship speaks to the Western mind directly. This can't be done by committee, but only by the deep assimilation of the Vedanta tradition of worship, until it finds new expression from the depths of someone immersed both in Vedanta and in Western culture.

Third, Vedanta went through a long period in India where it was competing with Nyaya and Vaisheshika, Sankhya and Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Buddhism. Its development was impacted by centuries of mutual interaction with these competing schools. Just as Greek philosophy is still of great interest to Western thinkers, though its schools are long since dead, so these schools of Indian philosophy are of interest in India; not so in the West. It is therefore likely that, in time, Western Vedantists

will find more value in relating Vedantic thought to Greek and Christian and Jewish thought than to Nyaya and Vaisheshika. This isn't a value judgment, simply a statement of fact. Just as in India Vedanta absorbed many of the positive contributions of the other schools of thought into itself, so Western Vedanta may in time absorb the positive contributions of Christianity and Judaism and Hellenic thought into itself.

Three Conditions for a Western Tradition

The foregoing is by no means a thorough list of elements that will define Western Vedanta as it matures. These are simply a few casual observations of one person, though I am confident that these at least will be threads of the cloth of Western Vedanta. The whole cloth, however, will be far more complex, and there will surely be threads unimagined here that will assume great importance.

When will there be a real Western Vedanta tradition? When these three conditions are met:

First, the truths of Vedanta must be fully and naturally assimilated into the lives and experience of a number of Western devotees, such that their way of thinking, their way of interpreting experience, is Vedantic.

Second, the truths thus assimilated must begin to find expression in the literature and music, art and theatre, folklore and customs of countries like America and France, Argentina and Germany. Such expression must be indigenous, not borrowed from India, according to the genius of each country—though certainly there can and will be great enrichment by assimilating Indian cultural forms as well.

Third, there must be Westerners who have attained to the heights of spirituality, who have become living embodiments of Vedantic truth.

When these three conditions are met, there will be vibrant traditions of Vedanta in the West. Yes, 'trad-

itions' plural, because each country will give unique expression to Vedanta through its own tradition.

A great experiment is currently going on in the laboratory of many human hearts. Western men and women are assimilating the principles of Vedanta, remaking their lives according to these principles, reinventing themselves in the light of these principles. Slowly, as the principles come alive within them, their experience is being altered, not just their thinking. More and more will they begin to give natural expression to an indigenous Vedanta, not better or worse than the original, and not different just to be different, but gloriously diverse as nature itself is diverse. And this process of naturalizing Vedanta in the West must culminate in the production of men and women of illumination. At that point the tradition will have taken shape, and a description of Western Vedanta—not just a prediction—will be possible.



Notes and References

1. Schopenhauer was first introduced to Vedanta in 1814 by a translation of the Upanishads from the Persian into Latin. The translation, by Anquetil Duperron, had been published in Europe in two volumes in 1801 and 1802.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 5-314.

Meditation tree at Ramakrishna Monastery, Trabuco



Anekāntavāda and the Harmony of Religions

Dr Jeffery D Long

ONE OF THE MOST DISTINCTIVE doctrines of modern Vedanta, often expressed in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and in the works of Swami Vivekananda, as well as in the writings of numerous other thinkers in the modern or Neo-Vedantic tradition, is its doctrine of the harmony of religions. This doctrine maintains that there is truth to be found in a variety of different traditions, and that following these traditions—despite the differences they exhibit amongst themselves, and between themselves and Vedanta—is conducive to the Vedantic goals of God-realization and liberation. This is not only an abstract claim, but was demonstrated in practice by Sri Ramakrishna in his various sadhanas.

Though it has its roots in the ancient Vedic teaching ‘*Ekaṁ sad-viprā bahudhā vadanti*; Reality is one, though the wise speak of it variously’¹, such a pluralistic vision of different systems of belief and practice is not nearly as pronounced in the works of the traditional Vedantic acharyas as it is in modern Vedanta. Traditional systems of Vedanta, such as Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita, seem, in their texts, to be far more concerned with establishing their own views and refuting those of others than with arguing that there is some truth in all positions.

In this paper, I will argue that the modern Vedantic emphasis on the harmony of religious and philosophical views is anticipated in the Indic traditions not so much in the traditional Vedantic schools

of thought—though it is implied in some Vedic sources—as in the Jain tradition. Specifically, the Jain doctrines of the multiplicity and the relativity of perspectives, *anekāntavāda*, *nayavāda*, and *syādvāda*, will be shown to exhibit a view of reality and an attitude towards religious and philosophical diversity very much in keeping with a modern Vedantic understanding of the harmony of religions.

Direct Experience Essential for Modern Vedantists

When I say ‘modern Vedanta’, I am referring specifically to the tradition that traces itself to the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and that is carried forward by the order of monks, nuns, and lay supporters making up the organization known in India as the Ramakrishna Mission and in the West mainly as the Vedanta societies. But more broadly, I would also take it as legitimate to include within this expression thinkers who have been demonstrably influenced by this tradition, like Mahatma Gandhi and S Radhakrishnan in India and Aldous Huxley, John Hick, and Huston Smith in the West.

The chief distinction between modern Vedanta and more traditional forms, such as Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita, is the emphasis that modern Vedanta places on the *anubhava*, direct experience, of the aspirant as the final source of spiritual authority. In modern Vedanta, the Vedic texts are conceived as a record of the experiences of enlightened sages, rishis, and the authority of these texts to have a provisional nature, acting as a guide to the nature of ultimate Reality. Because the experience of ultimate Reality is universal, and not confined to one particular culture, Swami Vivekananda writes:

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‘All scriptures, all truths are Vedas in all times, in all countries; because these truths are to be *seen*, and any one may discover them.’² The guidance of scripture is no longer needed after one experiences *nirvikalpa samādhi*, absorption in ultimate Reality, for as the Bhagavadgita says: ‘As useful as a water tank in a flood, is the Veda for one who has insight.’³ This absorption is achieved through the practice of one or more of the four yogas: karma, jnana, bhakti, and raja. As Anantanand Rambachan has pointed out in *Accomplishing the Accomplished* and *The Limits of Scripture*, this is quite distinct from the traditional view that the Vedas are an independent and sufficient *pramāṇa*, basis, for the jnana, knowledge, that leads to—and indeed constitutes—liberation, at least according to an Advaitic understanding of moksha. One might say that, for modern Vedanta, experience confirms the truth of the Vedas, whereas for traditional forms of Vedanta, the Vedas confirm the truth of experience.

Another important distinction between modern Vedanta and the traditional forms of Vedanta is that modern Vedanta conceives of itself as a synthesis or summation of all earlier forms, seeing Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita as corresponding to specific stages of spiritual evolution towards the goal of moksha. Both of these aspects of modern Vedanta—its foundation in experience and its sense of its relation to earlier forms of Vedanta—are significant when analysing its doctrine of religious pluralism. The basis in experience keeps this way of thinking from becoming overly dogmatic, because it is not confined to a particular text. But it is also not merely a form of relativism, making no distinctions among levels of truth, for it has its own clear view of the nature of reality.

Champions and Critics

Modern Vedantic religious pluralism has been famously expressed, using a wide variety of vivid metaphors, by Sri Ramakrishna, who is widely known for such statements as: ‘I have practiced all religions—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity—and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have

found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. ... He who is called Krishna is also called Siva, and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus, and Allah as well—the same Rama with a thousand names’⁴; ‘God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true. The important thing is to reach the roof. You can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a rope’⁵; and

It is not good to feel that one’s religion alone is true and all others are false. God is one only and not two. Different people call him by different names: some as Allah, some as God, and others as Krishna, Siva, and Brahman. It is like water in a lake. Some drink it at one place and call it ‘jal’, others at another place and call it ‘pani’, and still others at a third place and call it ‘water’. The Hindus call it ‘jal’, the Christians ‘water’, and the Mussulmans ‘pani’. But it is one and the same thing. Opinions are but paths. Each religion is only a path leading to God, as rivers come from different directions and ultimately become one in the one ocean. All religions and all paths call upon their followers to pray to one and the same God. Therefore one should not show disrespect to any religion or religious opinion.⁶

Mahatma Gandhi similarly writes:

Religions are different roads converging upon the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? In reality there are as many religions as there are individuals. ... I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.⁷

Such views are so central to and so widely associated with modern Vedanta; and modern Vedanta, in turn, is so often the medium through which Hinduism is expressed, particularly to Western audiences,

that religious pluralism has come to be seen by many, both Hindu and non-Hindu, as *the* Hindu view of religious diversity, and even as the most distinctively Hindu of beliefs, serving to contrast Hinduism with proselytizing traditions that insist on the exclusive truth and saving power of their own revelation. It is a doctrine that the proselytizing traditions strongly oppose when embraced by their own adherents.⁸

Recently, though, this view has come under attack from within the Hindu tradition itself, due to certain detrimental effects it is held to have had on the community over the course of the last century. The idea that ‘all religions are the same’ is not only demonstrably false, it also leads to a certain kind of intellectual laziness and disregard for what is distinctive about one’s own traditions. Today’s Hindus, it is claimed, are often unaware of the vast riches of their traditions in part because this idea of ‘radical universalism’—as one critic, Frank Morales, has called it—has led to a watering down of a sense of Hindu distinctiveness. Moreover, this is seen to make Hindus more vulnerable to unscrupulous conversion efforts

on the part

of communities that are far more conscious of their own distinctiveness, and also far more aggressive in promoting their own ideals than Hindus, who tend to follow a doctrine of ‘live and let live’ regarding religious difference precisely because of the modern Vedantic doctrine of religious pluralism.⁹

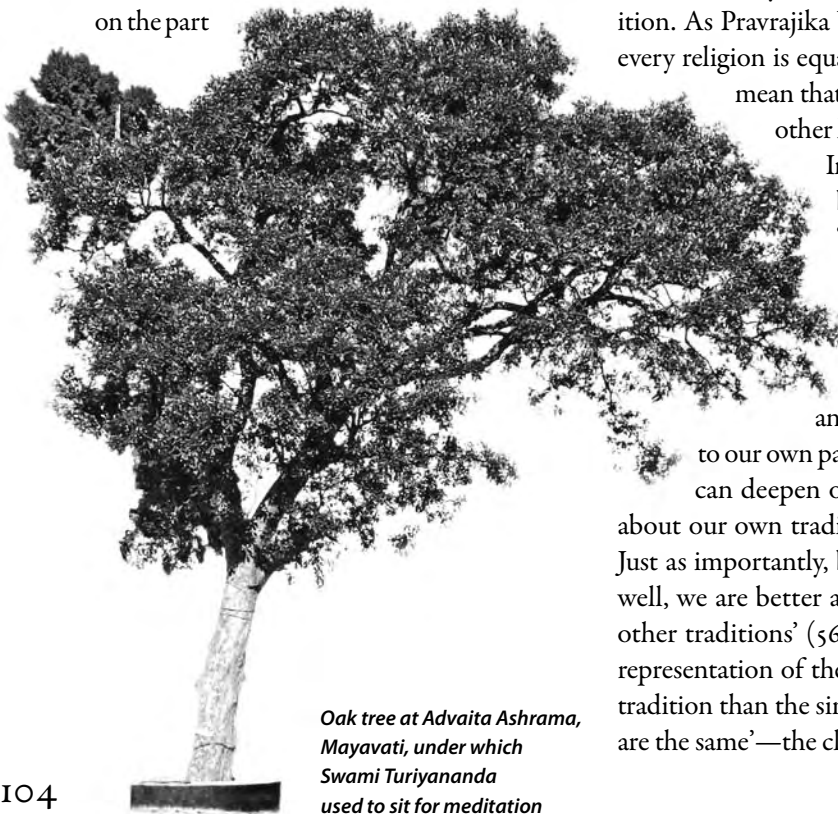
A Christian Conspiracy?

Because of the perceived vulnerability to conversion that radical universalism is seen to create, the criticism goes even further to claim that there is a Christian conspiracy at work in the modern Vedanta tradition, pointing to the influence of Unitarian thinking on Swami Vivekananda, via his earlier involvement, prior to meeting Sri Ramakrishna, in the Brahmo Samaj, whose founder, Rammohan Roy, was indeed heavily influenced by Unitarian thought.

One response to such criticism, of course, is that it misses the mark. The claim of modern Vedanta is *not* that ‘all religions are the same’. To again cite Gandhi, ‘Religions are *different* roads converging upon the same point.’ The differences among religions are most definitely acknowledged in the Vedanta tradition. As Pravrajika Vrajaprana states: ‘Saying that every religion is equally true and authentic doesn’t mean that one can be substituted for the other like generic brands of aspirin.’¹⁰

Instead, as Vrajaprana says, it is better to think of religions as ‘different pieces in a giant jigsaw puzzle: each piece is different and each piece is essential to complete the whole picture.

Each piece is to be honored and respected while holding firm to our own particular piece of the puzzle. We can deepen our own spirituality and learn about our own tradition by studying other faiths. Just as importantly, by studying our own tradition well, we are better able to appreciate the truth in other traditions’ (56–7). This is a more authentic representation of the view of the modern Vedanta tradition than the simplistic claim that ‘all religions are the same’—the claim that Morales attacks.



Oak tree at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, under which Swami Turiyananda used to sit for meditation

It is also odd to see pluralism as an idea that Christian missionaries would want to promote. If Hindus include pictures of Jesus Christ and his mother in their home altars, is this an indication that they are becoming Christian? Or is it a distinctively Hindu kind of religious act, which many Christians would find deeply offensive? If anything, pluralism would appear to stem the tide of conversion. In response to the evangelical claim that the Hindu has not yet 'found Jesus', the Hindu can reply, 'Of course I have. He's right here in my home altar with Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva, and Ma Kali. I have them all. Do you?'

I am also inclined to see the spread of religious pluralism among liberal Christian intellectuals like John Hick and David Ray Griffin as a Hinduization of Christianity, as more conservative Christians have charged, rather than seeing its promulgation within the Hindu community as a Christianization of Hinduism. Clearly, influence can move in both directions. While there is historical truth in the claim that Swami Vivekananda probably was influenced by Unitarianism, three further facts need to be noted. First, Unitarianism is hardly an evangelical form of Christianity. Many would claim it is not even Christian, because of its rejection of the central doctrine of the Trinity, and many Unitarians today do not regard themselves as Christian at all. Indeed, some regard themselves as Pagans or as Buddhists. Secondly, by far the most influential Unitarian thinker of the nineteenth century, Ralph Waldo Emerson, was heavily influenced by Hinduism, an influence which led directly to the transcendentalist movement in America, which included such figures as Henry David Thoreau—who, in turn, influenced Mahatma Gandhi. Finally, Sri Ramakrishna, the true fountainhead of modern Vedanta, was very unlikely to have been influenced by Unitarians at all. His interactions with the Brahmo Samaj happened relatively late in his life, after the famous period of his sadhanas—during which he developed his ideas about pluralism on the basis of having experienced the same samadhi as a result of following the practices of a wide variety of Hindu traditions, as well as Christianity and

Islam. It is upon the direct-realization experiences of Sri Ramakrishna, arrived at through a variety of means, that modern Vedanta bases its doctrine of religious pluralism, not on Unitarian influence.

If the point of the criticism, however, is that religious pluralism, or universalism, has been *misunderstood* as saying that 'all religions are the same,' and that *this* view has had the detrimental effect that its critics charge, then I must agree with them. But unlike the critics of religious pluralism, I take this to mean *not* that we must reject pluralism as a foreign growth within the body of Hinduism, but that we must very carefully re-articulate this idea in a way that will not produce such misunderstandings or negative effects. Such is the larger project behind this essay.

Traditional Precedents for Modern Vedantic Pluralism

The charge that modern Vedantic religious pluralism is a foreign import, an effect of the influence of the West on nineteenth and twentieth century Hindu thought, while having some validity, disregards the degree to which pluralism has been an undercurrent of the Hindu tradition since the period of the Rig Veda. I have already cited the famous Vedic statement 'Reality is one, though the wise speak of it variously'. There is also the statement of the Gita:

*Ye yathā mām prapadyante
tāms-tathaiva bhajāmyaham;
Mama vartmānuvartante
manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ.*

As human beings approach me, so I receive them.
All paths, Partha, lead to me.¹¹

Many pluralistic statements of this kind are scattered throughout the Shruti and Smriti literature. And there are, of course, the many pluralistic assertions of such figures as Kabir and Guru Nanak from the medieval period, claiming, in anticipation of Sri Ramakrishna and Gandhi, that the path one takes or the name that one chants is of less consequence than the sincerity of devotion given to one's Chosen Ideal, and that it is this devotion which leads to liberation.

The need of the hour, however, is not a list of quotations from the Hindu tradition that affirm the validity of many paths to a common goal. The need is for a logical and systematic argument for pluralism as following logically from a coherent and compelling world view that can address the range of possible objections to religious pluralism, such as the question of how many traditions which make substantially different claims can all be seen to lead to the same end—preferably, an argument rooted in the Indic traditions.

If one looks to traditional forms of Vedanta, however—and this lends credence to the anti-pluralist position—one does not find, despite the pluralistic sentiments one finds expressed in a variety of places in Vedic literature, a systematic argument for pluralism of the kind affirmed in modern Vedanta. To be sure, one does come across, in Shankara's Advaita and the Smarta tradition with which it is affiliated, the idea that there are many possible *iṣṭa devatās* towards which one may direct bhakti for the purpose of mental purification, a process that is preparatory to the jnana provided by the Vedas, the *śabda pramāṇa*.

This is significant because it is possible that from the practice of *pañcāyatana pūjā*—worship of the *devatās* Ganesha, Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu, and Surya—there emerged the practice of incorporating the deities of many religions into one's worship, offering bhakti not only to the Vedic deities, but to Buddha, Jesus Christ, and others as well.

But one does *not* find in Advaita Vedanta, as traditionally conceived, the idea that all paths to realization are equally adequate. There is finally one realization that leads to moksha and one valid *pramāṇa* for realizing it. There is also one *paramārtha satya*, one ultimate Truth, and that is that *nirguṇa brahman* is the sole Reality—all else being illusion, or maya.

This is in sharp contrast with the Vishishtadvaita of Ramanuja, according to which Ishvara and the world are real, the ultimate unity that they form—Brahman—being organic in nature, and Ishvara and the world bearing a relationship to one another analo-

gous to that of jiva and *śarīra*, soul and body, respectively. And this, in turn, is in contrast with the Dvaita of Madhva, for whom distinctness, not unity, is of central significance, and for whom the difference between Ishvara—specifically Lord Vishnu—and the individuals in the world is of paramount importance, being an indispensable condition for bhakti, which has the importance in the systems of both Ramanuja and Madhva that jnana does in that of Shankara. All of this is a far cry from Swami Vivekananda's affirmations about the equally valid and efficacious character of the karma, jnana, bhakti, and raja yogas. Each thinker has a distinctive view that he regards as true and that he defends against the rest.

Jainism: A Systematic Indic Defence of Pluralism?

A systematic argument for a pluralistic world view is not, however, completely lacking in the Indic darshanas. It is my claim that the closest thing to modern Vedantic religious pluralism in the Indic tradition—and the best candidate in this tradition for a systematic world view that can ground modern Vedantic pluralistic claims—is *anekāntavāda*, the Jain doctrine of multiplicity, along with its corollaries *nayavāda*, the doctrine of perspectives, and *syādvāda*, the doctrine of conditional predication.

According to *anekāntavāda*, reality is complex. It has many facets characterized by qualities that are of a seemingly contrary nature. In this complex reality, there exists something that persists and is continuous over time. It is this that makes possible notions such as identity and substance. In this reality, there is also something that is impermanent and changeable, giving rise to such notions as time and process. From the Jain perspective, an adequate account of reality is one which dismisses neither of these aspects as illusory, but which integrates both into a pluralistic world view.

The most obvious objects of critique here are Advaita Vedanta, which affirms that *nirguṇa brahman* alone is real and that all else—all that is subject to change—is an illusion, and Buddhism, which affirms that impermanence is the ultimate reality and

that all sense of self or personal identity over time is an illusion. From a Jain perspective, these views exhibit the fallacy of *ekāntatā*—one-sidedness, or failing to take into account the contrary point of view. The truth of any claim, according to the Jain tradition, is dependent upon the perspective, or *naya*, from which one makes that claim. Advaitins are correct *syāt*—that is, in a certain sense, or from a certain point of view—when they affirm the reality of the changeless and eternal Satchidananda. Buddhists are also correct, *syāt*—also in a certain sense, or from a certain point of view—when they affirm the reality of impermanence. In other words, a fundamental truth about the universe undergirds both perspectives and the spiritual practices that are based upon them. They are both false only inasmuch as each excludes the other.

This Jain approach to the multiplicity of religious and philosophical perspectives is in harmony with claims that one finds in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, that the relative world of change—in which the difference between devotee and *devatā* obtains, and bhakti yoga is the surest path to liberation—and the Absolute of the Advaita of the *brahmajñāni*, are both equally real. These are only different, but equally valid, ways of conceiving of reality. This makes the spiritual paths and practices based upon them equally valid paths to realization. For Sri Ramakrishna, *nitya*, the Eternal, and *lila*, the divine play, are one.¹²

To be sure, there are tendencies in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna—and more so in the writings of Vivekananda—to subordinate the Dvaitic to the Advaitic, the relative to the Absolute. But Sri Ramakrishna's devotion to the Divine Mother is such that it is hard to see him as a pure Advaitin. And the famous incident in which Sri Ramakrishna's Advaitic guru, Totapuri, concedes the supremacy of the Divine Mother after trying unsuccessfully to drown himself in the Ganga, strongly suggests that the Ramakrishna-Vedanta tradition would reject a one-sided insistence on the truth of the Absolute, at the expense of the relative, just as the Jains would.


The point here is not that Sri Ramakrishna was

influenced by Jainism. I suspect the direct influence of Jainism on Sri Ramakrishna's thought to have been minimal, if not non-existent. At least a strong Jain influence is not attested to in the extant primary sources on his life and teachings. But I believe that if one were to translate Sri Ramakrishna's teaching on religious pluralism into a systematic philosophy in a traditional Indic idiom, one would come up with something very much like *anekāntavāda* and *syādvāda*.

One difficulty which modern Vedanta faces with regard to any attempt to include this elegant Jain system of logic in its rhetorical arsenal in defence of its doctrine of religious pluralism is that the more traditional forms of Vedanta were not only not always pluralistic, but that the acharyas of all the major schools explicitly rejected the Jain view in their commentaries on Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra*. If, however, one examines their reasons for doing so, one finds that they have consistently mischaracterized the Jain view, considering it as one in which contrary predications can be made of an entity in the same sense and at the same time, in violation of the law of non-contradiction. This, however, is not what the Jains say. The Jains, rather, are quite explicit in claiming that a condition for affirming the truth of contrary predications is a specification pertaining to such variables as time and location with regard to the quality in question. The traditional Vedantic rejections of *anekāntavāda*, like contemporary critiques of pluralism, suffer from the defect of missing the mark.

Conclusion

To be sure, strong arguments already exist in the Ramakrishna tradition for its teaching of religious harmony. A 'large body of writing' has been 'put forth by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition for more than a hundred years cogently arguing its stand on the harmony of religions as visualized, professed, and preached by Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, and their followers.'¹³ But the ancient Indic darshanas or philosophical systems are not lacking in precedents for this teaching,

despite being often preoccupied with polemical attacks upon one another's views. The Jain tradition is an especially rich resource, an additional tool, for adherents of the view of Sri Ramakrishna to utilize in articulating and defending this position.¹⁴ 

Notes and References

1. Rig Veda, 1.164.46.
2. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 7.9.
3. Bhagavadgita, 2.46.
4. Swami Nikhilananda, *Ramakrishna: Prophet of New India* (New York: Harper, 1948), 29.
5. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 111.
6. Glyn Richards, *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 65.
7. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*, 156-7. Though Gandhi was not formally a member of the Ramakrishna tradition, his thought bears all of the hallmarks of modern Vedanta as I have described it here.
8. Christian theologians such as John Hick, for example, who embrace the idea of many true paths to God, are heavily attacked by more conservative thinkers who see this idea as an abandonment of central Christian principles.
9. Morales' article first appeared on his website, 'Dharmacentral.com', in 2005 <<http://www.dharmacentral.com/universalism.htm>>. It has been widely criticized by scholars in the Ramakrishna tradition, including myself.
10. Pravrajika Vrajaprana, *Vedanta: A Simple Introduction* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1999), 55-6.
11. Gita, 4.11.
12. See *Gospel*, 480.
13. Swami Satyaswarupananda, personal communication.
14. For a more in-depth account of the Jain doctrines of relativity, see Jeffery D Long, *Jainism: An Introduction* (London: I B Tauris, 2009). And for a more in-depth version of the argument of this essay, see Jeffery D Long, *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism* (London: I B Tauris, 2007).

Sri Ramakrishna and Religious Harmony

About the ultimate Reality, one thing Sri Ramakrishna insisted on was not to put any limit to God. God is not wholly unknowable. He can be realized; but the human mind cannot grasp the whole inexhaustible mystery of God. He said, 'Men often think they have understood Brahman fully. Once an ant went to a sugar hill. One grain filled its stomach. Taking another grain it thought, "Next time I shall carry home the whole hill." He also held that the ultimate Reality is both Personal and Impersonal and it is known by different names in different religions. Just as water congeals into ice, so under the cooling influence of the bhakta's love, the Impersonal appears as the Personal.

Sri Ramakrishna's second tenet is that realization of God is the essential core of religion. In all religions the ultimate goal of life is held to be going back to God. In the mystical religions which originated in India, the realization of God through direct mystical experience is regarded as possible even in the present birth. In other religions it is expected to take place after death. This God experience is a central principle on which harmony of religions can be established.

The third teaching of Sri Ramakrishna on harmony of religions is that, although the ultimate Reality is one,

it can be realized through several paths. ... This is his famous doctrine of 'yata mat tat path, as many faiths, so many paths'. In this connection it should be pointed out that Sri Ramakrishna's view that all religions are valid paths to the ultimate Reality refers to the major religions of the world. He was aware of the existence of certain cults, sects, and groups which indulged in degenerate practices. He did not condemn them but compared them to the small back-door in old fashioned houses in India through which the scavenger enters the house.

Ishtanishtha or steadfastness to one's Chosen Ideal or path is another principle in Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine of harmony. He wanted everyone to stick to his own religion or spiritual path and strive his utmost to realize the supreme goal. But along with steadfastness to one's religion, one should also have love and respect for other religions. What he disapproved most was the closed mindset of a dogmatic or fanatic person. He also never liked to disturb anybody's faith or devotional attitude. He tried to strengthen each one's faith in his own path and encourage them to follow it.

—Based on Swami Bhajananda,
*Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of
Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda*, 30-4

Texts and Traditions



Advaita in the Bhagavata

Swami Purnananda

KRISHNA DVAIPAYANA VYASA classified the Vedic corpus as revealed to the rishis into three groups—Rig, Yajur, and Sama—in accordance with the specific use that these mantras were to be put to in Vedic yajnas. The mantras not amenable to this classification were placed in the Atharva Veda. After completing this codification, Vyasa imparted the Vedas to his four disciples. He taught Paila the Rig Veda, Vaishampayana the Yajur Veda, Jaimini the Sama Veda, and Sumantu the Atharva Veda. For this work Vyasa is called Vedavyasa—the codifier of the Vedas. Vyasa also wrote the Bhagavata, wherein he has described the various lilas, divine play, of Bhagavan. He taught the Bhagavata to his only son Shukadeva. To the devout, the Bhagavata is the fifth Veda.

Vyasa is also one of the highest authorities on the Vedanta philosophy. He summarized the tenets of Vedanta in five hundred and fifty-five terse aphorisms called the *brahma-sūtras* or *vyāsa-sūtras*. The *Brahma Sutra* text is considered to be one of the three *prasthānas*, textual authorities of Vedanta philosophy. Besides the *Brahma Sutra*, Vyasa is the author of another of the *prasthānas*: the Bhagavad-gita. It is the cream of the Mahabharata, the great epic written by Vyasa himself. These two *prasthānas* follow and elaborate upon the main *prasthāna*: the Upanishads, which are also called the *śruti prasthāna* because of their being part and parcel of Shruti, the Vedas. The Gita is called the *smṛti prasthāna*, and the *Brahma Sutra* is the *nyāya prasthāna* as it sets forth the logical coherence of Vedic texts.

Given the relevance of Vyasa in the compos-

ition and dissemination of texts of seminal importance to Advaita Vedanta, we can certainly assume that Vyasa had an Advaitic orientation and that he endeavoured to establish Advaita as a philosophy. His last work, the Bhagavata, was expressly written to record his love for the Divine; nonetheless, even this text bears the tune of Advaita. It is the final purport of the Vedas to establish the identity of the jiva, individual soul, with Brahman, the absolute Reality. One can realize this ultimate Truth by the way of knowledge, through proper discernment between what is real and what is virtual or non-real. The realization of Truth leads to mukti, liberation. The Bhagavata assures us that the realization of Truth can also be had through the way of bhakti: divine love towards Bhagavan or Ishvara, who is none other than Brahman in essence, though characterized by numerous divine attributes. Out of sheer compassion towards devotees, Ishvara assumes form to satisfy their needs.

In the Bhagavata Vyasa establishes the Advaita theory in the very context of divine love towards the Supreme Being. He begins the invocatory *mangalācaraṇa* of the text with the second aphorism of his *Brahma Sutra*:

*Janmādyasya yato'nvayād-
itarataścārtheṣvabhijñāḥ svarāt;
Tene brahma hṛdā ya ādikavaye
muhyaṁti yat-sūrayaḥ.
Tejo-vāri-mṛdāṁ yathā vinimayo
yatra trisargō'mṛṣā;
Dhāmnā svena sadā nirasta-kubakam
satyaṁ param dhīmahi.*

He from whom the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe take place; who is both the material and the instrumental cause of it; who is omniscient; who is the only one having self-

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mastery, being the one independent entity; who illumined the mind of Brahma with the Vedic revelation whose wisdom is the wonder of even the greatest of sages; in whom the worlds, the manifestation of the three *guṇas*, subsist in reality without in the least affecting him—just as the combination of material elements like fire, water, and earth subsist in their causes without changing their elemental nature—in whose light of consciousness there is no place for anything false; on that Truth Supreme we meditate.¹

The Non-dual Principle

Advaita philosophy maintains that there is one supreme entity, without any qualifying attributes or limiting adjuncts, infinite in every respect, of the nature of pure Consciousness: Brahman. This is the absolute Truth, *pāramārthika satya*. No entity other than Brahman—which is Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss Absolute, in essence—is accorded the status of ultimate Reality in *advaita-vāda*, the theory of non-dualism. This ultimate Principle is also called *tattva*—absolute unitary Knowledge. The Bhagavata says:

*Vadanti tat-tattva-vidas-tattvaṁ
yaj-jñānam-advayam;
Brahmeti paramātmēti
bhagavān-iti śabdyate.*

The non-dual Consciousness, which is described by the enlightened ones as the supreme Principle, is variously called Brahman (by Vedantins), Paramatman (by yogis, the votaries of Hiranyagarbha), and Bhagavan (by devotees) (1.2.11).

This supreme Consciousness itself manifests through the three-dimensional matrix of time, space, and causation as this universe characterized by name and form. This phenomenon is dependent on the existence of a beginningless nescience—that veils Consciousness or Knowledge—which Vedantins call *maya*, in the cosmic context, and *avidyā*, in the individual. The bhaktas call it Mahamaya, the power of the Supreme Being. The Bhagavata also accepts this Supreme Being as the lord of the uni-

verse and calls him Vishnu; from Vishnu emerges this universe. Etymologically, 'Vishnu' means 'that which pervades all, in and out'. The form and name taken by the Supreme Being facilitates his *upāsana*, worship, by bhaktas. Vishnu thus has two aspects: transcendent and immanent. The immanent aspect is the personal God or Ishvara—called Vishnu—and the transcendent is Brahman. But these aspects do not vitiate Vishnu's unitary nature. This is a key principle of the Bhagavata.

Creation and Incarnation

Advaita Vedanta maintains that Brahman is both the material and the instrumental cause of Creation. In the Bhagavata *maya* or Prakriti, the primordial power of Ishvara, is the material cause. This power undergoes transformation and takes the form of the universe under the direction of Ishvara, the unmodified instrumental cause. Sri Krishna declares in the Gita: '*Prakṛtiṁ svāmavaśṭabhya visrjāmi punaḥ punaḥ*; by controlling my Prakriti, divine Power, I create (this universe) again and again.'² Further: '*Mayā'dhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sūyate sacarācaram*; under my direction Prakriti brings forth all that is moving and non-moving' (9.10).

The Bhagavata also says:

Though himself beyond the *guṇas*, the Supreme Being has his inherent power—*ātma-māyā*—constituted of the three *guṇas* of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, capable of sustaining the dual condition of cause and effect. By virtue of this power, Ishvara projects all that is seen as the universe. That power having manifested all forms, which are the combination of *guṇas*, Ishvara enters into them through an apparent identification, though he remains unaffected owing to his immaculate Self-awareness. Just as the one fire entering into different pieces of wood manifests as many fires according to the fuel, so the Supreme Being, the soul of all, manifests as the many in the various forms produced by the combinations of the *guṇas* of Prakriti.³

The Bhagavata further elaborates: 'The Shakti, primordial power, of the Lord has three aspects: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, being respectively the

forces of peace and enlightenment, passion and activity, and darkness and inertia. The Supreme Being, Vasudeva, assumes these three aspects of his Shakti for the purpose of creation, preservation, and dissolution, and comes to be known respectively as Brahma, Hari (Vishnu), and Hara (Shiva)' (1.2.23). The process of Creation has been described in several parts of the Bhagavata. There is an especially detailed description in the third Skandha.

The Bhagavata maintains that there have been an infinite number of incarnations of Ishvara in the various cycles of Creation. In order to protect and sustain Sanatana Dharma, Eternal Religion, Ishvara incarnates assuming diverse names and forms in different ages. When God incarnates, a *yuga*, era, is set in motion. Bhagavan says in the Gita: 'Whenever there is a decline of dharma and a rise of *adharma*, then O Bharata, I embody myself.'⁴ Why should Sanatana Dharma, which has been established by Bhagavan himself, decline? Acharya Shankara, the greatest Advaitic commentator on Vedantic texts, says: 'When, after a long time, dharma became overpowered by *adharma*, and *adharma* increased owing to the deterioration of discriminative knowledge, caused by the rise of desire in the minds of followers (of this dharma), then, as tradition goes, Vishnu, called Narayana, the Prime Mover, took birth.'⁵ Not only does Bhagavan descend in human forms, he also does so in such other forms as fish, tortoise, and boar. How does he incarnate? Bhagavan says:

*Ajō'pi sannavyayātmā
bhūtānām-īśvarō'pi san;
Prakṛtiṁ svām-adhiṣṭhāya
sambhavāmy-ātma-māyayā.*

Though I am birthless, undecaying by nature, and also the Lord of all beings, (yet) taking possession of my own Prakriti, I take birth by means of my own maya.⁶

We have this idea in the Bhagavata also: 'He, being the protector of all the worlds, extends His grace and help by condescending to manifest Himself as divine incarnations among gods, animals, and humans.'⁷

Acharya Shankara elaborates on this theory of incarnation of the Divine in his introductory commentary on the Gita: 'He, the Lord, ever endowed with Knowledge, Sovereignty, Strength, Valour, and Formidability, exercises his command over his own maya ... and as such, through his own maya, he appears as if embodied, as if born, and as if favouring people—though by nature he is birthless, changeless, the Lord of all creatures, eternal, pure, conscious, and free.'⁸

The Bhagavata opens with six questions put to Suta Ugrashravas, a master of Puranic lore, by the rishis assembled at Naimisharanya for a Vedic sacrifice: (i) What is the means by which jivas can achieve the ultimate good? (ii) What is the essence of all scriptures that is conducive to universal well-being? (iii) What was the cause for the Lord's incarnation through Devaki and Vasudeva? (iv) What were the principle divine lilas that Bhagavan manifested in other incarnations? (v) What were the superhuman deeds that Bhagavan performed in his incarnations as Krishna and Balarama? (vi) Whom did dharma find refuge in after Krishna—the lord of yoga, the lover of holy persons, and the protector of dharma—had finished his earthly play and returned to his eternal abode?

The answers to these questions constitute the entire text of the Bhagavata. So the Bhagavata is Vyasa's opus elaborately describing the lilas of the Lord incarnate. Chapter Seven of the second Skandha dwells on various incarnations, on the need for incarnations, and their divine acts.

Virat and Its Worship

In Vedanta 'Virat' refers to the aggregate of all the gross individual entities in the universe. This aggregate—conceived of as a living entity—is called 'Virat' because it manifests in various names and forms: *vividhena rājamānatvāt virāt*. This universe is conceived of as having three states of existence: causal, subtle, and gross. The Supreme Being is immanent in all of these. Virat is thus the gross form of Bhagavan appearing as the visible universe: 'This universe, which is the grossest of the gross entities,

is the form of the Lord. In this cosmic form all of the past, the present, and the future subsists. Permeating this universal cosmic form, with its seven sheaths—consisting of the five elements, (cosmic) egoism, and the universal intelligence (Mahat)—there resides the Virat Purusha, the Cosmic Divinity, the immanent form of the Lord. He is the real object of concentration.⁹

The universal subtle form of the Supreme Being is called Sutratman or Hiranyagarbha, and the aggregate of all beings in their causal state is called Ishvara, the origin of the cosmos. This ontology is common to Advaita Vedanta and the Bhagavata. The same Supreme Being, the immutable One, pervades all the three states—gross, subtle, and causal—as the *antaryāmin*, the Indweller. Virat, Hiranyagarbha, and Ishvara are but different names of Saguna Brahman, Brahman with attributes. The *antaryāmin* Purusha has three aspects: *ādhyātmika*, *ādhidaivika*, and *ādhibhautika*:

The *ādhyātmika*, that is, the spirit that feels identified with the body and its sense organs like the eye, is none other than the *ādhidaivika*, that is, the spirit whose manifestation the presiding deities over the senses like Aditya are. And the physical body which renders possible this distinction between the individual spirit and the presiding deities is the *ādhibhautika*. In the absence of any one of these, the others cannot be conceived. He who is the witness of all these three, that is, in whose presence they manifest, is the Support. And he himself has no other support; He is the support of all (2.10.8–9).

We find this idea in the *Aitareya Upanishad* too:

This One is (the inferior) Brahman; this is Indra, this is Prajapati; this is all these gods; and this is these five elements: earth, air, space, water, fire; and this is all these (big creatures), together with the tiny ones, that are the procreators of others and referable in pairs—those that are born of eggs, of wombs, of moisture, and of the earth—horses, cattle, men, elephants, and all the creatures that there are which move or fly and those which do

not move. All these are impelled by Consciousness; all these have Consciousness as the giver of their reality; the universe has Consciousness as its eye, and Consciousness as its end. Consciousness is Brahman.¹⁰

According to the Bhagavata, all work ought to be performed in keeping with Varnashrama Dharma—the task ordained according to one's place in society and personal inclination—in order to please Bhagavan. Any karma that does not incline the mind towards the Lord is futile exertion. Through all of their actions, human beings must direct their minds to the Divine. To the one-pointed mind, Bhagavan should be the only object of hearing, chanting, meditation, and worship. The attainment of the grace of the Lord is the true end of the proper discharge of all duties—sacred and secular—ordained according to the Varnashrama Dharma.¹¹ Karma performed in the spirit of service

The man of steady intellect should not, even though oppressed by creatures that are themselves under the sway of destiny, swerve from his path, being conversant with this fact—this is the trait I have learnt from the earth.

The yogi, moving amid sense objects possessed of diverse characters, should not be attached to them, keeping his mind absolutely free from their virtues and shortcomings, like the wind.

As the sky is not touched by things which are the products of fire, water, and earth, not by clouds driven by the wind, so a man should not be touched by things which are the creations of time.

Pure, genial by nature, sweet, and a source of imparting holiness to men, the sage—resembling water—purifies all, being seen, touched, and praised by them.

Bright, resplendent with tapas, powerful, with no receptacle for food except the belly, and eating everything—the person with self-control, like fire, is not polluted (thereby).

—Bhagavata, 11.7.37, 40, 43–5

is to be ultimately transformed into worship. When thus worshipped with great earnestness, Bhagavan manifests in the heart of the worshipper.

Worship also has other aspects like *śaraṇāgati*, self-surrender, and pure devotion. Pure love expresses itself naturally through service. When devotees first start serving God in an image, they have the idea that the form or image is not the actual deity but only its symbolic representation. As the image is more symbolic and mental than actual, the devotees' response to it has a marked subjective quality. But as their horizons expand, the service also gradually expands in scope until it includes all beings. This is service to the whole world as divine manifestation. This concept of service as worship is thus rooted in the philosophical idea of the universe as a Cosmic Person, Virat Purusha, the identification of God with the universe. That all elements of nature as well as human society are really parts of the Cosmic Being is also stressed in various sections of the Bhagavata.

Synthesis of the Four Yogas

In the Bhagavata we find a synthesis of the four ways of sadhana: jnana, karma, bhakti, and yoga. By leading a contemplative life one can reach the threshold of jnana. This can be done, for instance, by contemplation on the divine forms, divine plays, and divine virtues of Bhagavan. Ultimately, one develops the capacity to meditate on the real nature of the Divine, beyond all names and forms. One can attain mukti by realizing this true nature of the Supreme Being. This knowledge manifests spontaneously when bhakti reaches its pinnacle. Then all distinction and sense of separation is destroyed for ever. The mind becomes poised, engrossed in enjoying the constant and very lively presence of the Lord in the heart.

Devotees start with ritualistic worship of some symbolic representation called *pratīka*—a *śālagrāma*, for instance—or a *pratimā*, image of the Chosen Deity. They concentrate all their minds on the Chosen Deity through these forms. Gradually, a spirit of detachment towards worldly affairs

manifests in their minds, which then remain unperturbed by worldly woes—like the unwavering flame of a candle in a place free from breeze. This is the state of pure yoga, marked by a continuous stream of focused thought with uniform content. In this state the mind takes the shape of the *iṣṭa devatā*, Chosen Deity.

According to Prahlada, the essence of all such worship is renunciation and total self-surrender to God; according to Narada, it is continuous remembrance of God. The former emphasizes *tyāga*, the spirit of renunciation, and the latter the spirit of yoga. In the Gita, Krishna emphasizes both these aspects and adds that the essence of all worship consists in self-control and in looking upon all beings as God. He exhorts Arjuna to be a yogi. In the Bhagavata, Bhagavan Kapila says to his mother Devahuti: 'I abide in all beings as their innermost soul. Ignoring my presence within them, mortal beings make a show of my worship through images. ... So, one should worship me—who am the innermost soul residing in all—in every being, with gifts, honour, love, and an attitude of non-separateness' (3.29.21, 27). We can summarize the Bhagavata teachings on sadhana thus: Practising self-control, one should fix one's mind on Bhagavan; working for his sake, taking refuge in him, and surrendering all results of work unto him, one is to serve everyone with utmost love, bearing in mind that all forms are temples of the Divine—in every being the Lord resides, sports, and enjoys—and that no one else exists but the Supreme Being, capturing all within and without.

Realization and Liberation

When devotion reaches a purified state endowed only with *sattva*, the mind becomes transparent, devoid of the turbidity of motives and desires begotten from the samskaras left by past karma. Ultimately, love is transformed into jnana, which destroys all awareness of separation, the product of *avidyā*. The object of worship or devotion becomes the subject: 'Devotion to Vasudeva, the Lord, quickly generates abhorrence for sensual life and bestows the transcendental knowledge which is beyond the grasp

of logical controversies' (1.2.7). This transcendental knowledge manifests *bhagavat-tattva-vijñāna*, the intuition of the Supreme Being as the absolute Reality. That is the ultimate realization of a devotee. This brings liberation from the bonds of samsara: 'When the Supreme Soul is thus intuited within oneself, the knots of the heart that make one feel oneself as an ego (one with the body) are severed, and all the accumulated karmas of the past as also those in the offing are liquidated' (1.2.21). This is mukti, the highest of the four *puruṣārthas*, goals of human life. It is a state where all bondages are annulled and an unhampered freedom is felt. It is the achievement, or rather the recovery, of the natural divinity, bliss, and perfection of the soul, much like the retrieval of a lost treasure trove. The freedom is from maya and her delusions: ignorance, doubt, misery, fear, egoism, passion, desire, attachment, and the sense of difference, which constitute impurities of the mind. This is the realization of Brahman as stated in the Bhagavata:

*Yatreme sadasadrūpe pratiṣiddhe svasamvidā;
Avidyayātmani kṛte iti tad-brahma-darśanam.*

When both these bodies, the gross and the subtle, fabricated on the Atman by ignorance, are sublated through the awareness of their base—that is the realization of Brahman (1.3.33).

Vijñāna

An ardent devotee never hankers after mukti, or the realization of one's identity with Brahman, or the elimination of separation between oneself and Bhagavan. A true devotee always wants to enjoy the *mādhurya*, sweetness, of the Lord. But as devotees become free from maya's bondage and delusion, they come to enjoy Bhagavan's presence through *sālokya*, residence in the same abode, *sāmīpya*, constant association, *sārūpya*, similarity of form, and *sārṣṭi*, similar powers. They get all these even though they do not want them. They only seek pure love for and devotion to the Lord, and they are completely content with this.


True devotees experience the presence of

Bhagavan everywhere and realize that the Lord has taken all the forms that are there in this universe; the entire universe is the body of Bhagavan. This is the state of *vijñāna*, knowledge par excellence. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'To know many things is ajñāna, ignorance. To know only one thing is jñāna, Knowledge—the realization that God alone is real and that He dwells in all. And to talk to Him is vijñāna, a fuller Knowledge.'¹² This, Sri Ramakrishna reminds us, is the highest state achievable in human life.

A common verse goes thus:

*Dvaitam bandhāya nūnam prāk
prāpte bodhe manīṣayā;
Bhaktiā yat-kalpitaṁ dvaitam-
advaitādapi sundaram.*

Though the sense of duality is a cause of bondage in the beginning, after the attainment of knowledge through the purified intellect, the duality ascribed out of love is more beautiful than non-duality.

The Advaita as recorded and illustrated in the Bhagavata is indeed, as Sri Ramakrishna suggested, sweet as cake 'fried in the butter of knowledge and steeped in the honey of love'. 

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Confronting Ravana's

Swami Sukhananda

THOUGH BELONGING TO THE LINEAGE of the famous Rishi Pulastya, Ravana is known to all as a *rakshasa* for the traits he displays. Born to Rishi Vishravas, he undergoes severe tapas, only to use the power gained from austerities in developing and maintaining demonic behaviour. Goswami Tulsidas tells us that the varied fierce austerities undertaken by the three brothers Ravana, Kumbhakarna, and Vibhishana defy description:

*Kinha bibidha tapa tinihun bhai
Param ugra nahi barani so jai.*¹

These included staying amidst fire during summer, sitting or standing in cold water during winter, and standing on one leg for years together. Pleased with their tapas, Brahma appeared before them to bestow boons. He went to Ravana first. Ravana saluted him and prayed:

*Ham kabu ke marahin na mare
Banar manuj jati dui bare.*

May I not die at the hands of any creature
barring man and monkey (1.177.2).

Tapas for Pleasure

Ravana clearly does not want to die. He underwent austerity and tortured his body to have the vision of God; so one gets the feeling that he has tremendous devotion for God. But the moment he sees God, he prays for prolonged life. Though engaged in austerity, he wants to perpetually enjoy the things of the world. He desires to keep happy the very body

which he tortured with austerities to have the vision of God. His temperament is all for staying on and enjoying. He makes an exception for man and monkey when asking for the boon of deathlessness because men and monkeys are food for demons. He could never imagine the possibility of being killed by them.

Ravana's mental attitude is there in us too. We have devotion to God; but do we really want him? Most of us profess devotion to God for the sake of facilities and conveniences. Devotees ask many things of God: employment for sons, marriage for daughters, wealth, promotion, and so on. We want everything but God. Initially, many of us set forth on a spiritual journey to reach God and undergo many hardships. After some days of hardship, we start thinking of physical comforts.

Following the dictates of our desires when feeding the body, we hardly think whether what we eat is beneficial for our body and mind. We eat lavishly, but forget that food is meant to keep the body fit. We have to eat to live, but often we make our bodies suffer by eating wrongly. In one sense we push ourselves into the mouth of death by eating anything that comes our way. The beings which Ravana thought were his food became the cause of his death; he invited his own death. Many a time we act in similar fashion.

Rama killed Ravana, but the demonical attitudes that he personified did not die with him. The Ravana represented by these tendencies continues to reside in us; we see this every day. Moreover, there are times when we actually go about helping those displaying these traits—we listen to them, we serve them. We do not feel that we are erring in doing so. So long as this Ravana is in us, we cannot have peace and happiness. Only when we come in

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contact with saintly persons, free from such tendencies, are we made aware of our lapse and also shown the way out.

There are also spiritual aspirants who resemble Kumbhakarna. After granting Ravana's wish, when Brahma goes to Kumbhakarna, he is worried about what he will ask. Kumbhakarna's frame is as huge as a mountain and his mouth is like a massive cave. He is a voracious eater, feasting regularly on humans and animals. He wants to have the ability to keep eating for six months straight, making up all his need for sleep in one day. Brahma realizes that if this wish were to be granted, Creation could not possibly be sustained—Kumbhakarna would eat away everything in no time. To avoid any such eventuality, Brahma requests Saraswati to confuse Kumbhakarna's thinking. So, when he is asked to tell his wish, Kumbhakarna says: 'I wish to sleep for six months and eat for one day at a time.' Brahma is quick in granting this boon, and Kumbhakarna sleeps.

The Selfless Devotee

It is now Vibhishana's turn. Brahma is very happy to approach him and calls him 'son':

*Gaye bhibhishan pas puni
kabeu putra bar magu;
Tehi mangeu bhagavant-pad
kamal amal anuragu.*

Next he went to Vibhishana and said, 'Son, ask a boon.' He (Vibhishana) asked for pure devotion to the lotus feet of God (1.177).

Vibhishana stays with Ravana even after obtaining the boon of pure devotion to God. He is unable to share his suffering with anyone, for there is none in Lanka who can understand him. Living righteously is difficult in Lanka; it is a kingdom of demons busily catering to their desires for material comforts. The *rakshasas* do not understand Vibhishana's spiritual needs.

It is Hanuman who discerns Vibhishana's plight when he visits Lanka. He has gone there to find Sita and searches for her everywhere:

*Mandir mandir prati kari sodha
Dekhe jahan tahan aganit jodha;
Gaeu dasanan-mandir mahi
Ati bichitra kahi jat so nahi.
Sayan kien dekha kapi tehi
Mandir mahu na dikhi baidehi.*

He (Hanuman) searched through every mansion and saw countless warriors here and there. He went into Ravana's palace, too wonderful to describe. He saw Ravana asleep, but did not see Sita therein (5.5.3).

It is interesting that Tulsidas calls every palace or home a *mandir*, temple. Generally, we call a place a temple only if God is worshipped there, but Tulsidas calls even Ravana's bedroom a temple. Evidently, Tulsidas is writing in the language of Lanka—in Lanka, a place where the body is worshipped is a temple. Tulsidas sees this worship in every home there. He remarks: '*Mandir mahu na dikhi baidehi*'; Vaidehi (Sita) could not be seen in the temple.' How could one find Vaidehi, the daughter of Videha—one devoid of body consciousness—in a temple where the body is worshipped! Hence, it is not surprising that Hanuman does not find Vaidehi in these temples.

We need to seriously ponder whether it is God we are worshipping in our homes or our bodies. Many homes have shrines for worship, but we ought to check if the paraphernalia of worship is meant truly for God or is merely a means for embellishing ourselves. We use numerous cosmetics to make ourselves up. What do we do for God?

Meanwhile, Hanuman continues his search and comes across an unusual sight:

*Bhavan ek puni dikh suhava
Harimandir tahan bhinna banava.*

He then saw one beautiful house that had a separate shrine for Hari (5.5.4).

He is struck with wonder: How could there be a good being, a devotee, in the midst of demons? At that very moment, Vibhishana gets up uttering the name of Sri Rama! Hanuman decides to approach

Vibhishana in the guise of a brahmana. Vibhishana, in turn, is delighted at the sight of a devout person. He says to Hanuman, 'My heart is filled with overpowering love at your sight. Who are you? Are you a servant of God?' Hanuman then introduces himself and tells him the true purpose of his visit.

After a long time Vibhishana was finally meeting a person who could understand his feelings and sorrows. He tells Hanuman, 'My position here is much like that of the tongue in the midst of teeth.' The other *rakshasas* are tough as teeth, while Vibhishana has the soft heart of a righteous devotee. The tongue can ill afford to get in the way of the teeth; the slightest carelessness can cause it great damage. Such is Vibhishana's plight, the reason for all his worries and sorrows.

Vibhishana also underwent great austerity and asked the boon of devotion to God. Even then he is not at peace, for he has to help Ravana, stay under his rule, and obey his orders; he is unable to leave the company of the unrighteous. His devotion for Sri Rama is enhanced by meeting Hanuman. Initially, he doubts if he would be accepted by Sri Rama, as he happens to be Ravana's brother; but meeting Hanuman dispels all such fears:

*Ab mohi bha bharos hanumanta
Binu hari-kripa milahi nahi santa.*

O Hanuman, I am now confident (that Sri Rama's grace is on me); for it is not possible to meet a saint without the grace of God (5.7.2).

Divine Grace

Hanuman too is overwhelmed with emotion while speaking of God's grace. With tears in his eyes, he says, 'What merit of birth can I claim? We are monkeys, restless by nature, utterly contemptible. If someone happens to mention our names in the morning, they are sure to go without food that day! But Sri Rama has showered his grace even upon me.' Disregarding such grace, if people wish to enjoy worldly pleasures, how can they find peace? As Ravana only wants material pleasures, Vibhishana now makes up his mind: he should be told to

turn to the path of God. If he disagrees, then parting ways is the only option.

So Vibhishana goes to Ravana's court and tries to persuade him to change his ways:

*Kam krodh mad moha sab
nath narak ke panth;
Sab parihari raghubir-hi
bhajahu bhajahin jehi sant.*

O Lord! Lust, anger, arrogance, and delusion are all paths to hell. Give these up and serve Sri Rama whom the saints worship (5.38).

He continues, 'Don't consider Sri Rama to be an ordinary person. He is Brahman, the master of the universe—all-pervading, invincible, without beginning or end. An ocean of compassion, he has incarnated for the welfare of the righteous, for destruction of evil and for the protection of dharma. The Lord does not abandon one who seeks refuge in him, even if he happens to be the enemy of the whole world. Return Sita to Sri Rama and surrender to him, the selfless friend of all.'

Such talk only enrages Ravana. He retorts angrily, 'You are glorifying the enemy in front of me. Get away!' Vibhishana is persistent. Holding Ravana's feet, he says, 'Only return Sita, it will do you good.' Ravana is infuriated, 'You eat my food and love Rama. Then go and stay with him.' Saying so, he kicks Vibhishana away. But the saintly Vibhishana bears no grudge against Ravana. He says, 'You are like father to me. (You have the right to punish me.) But your welfare lies in worshipping Sri Rama.' With this parting advice, Vibhishana goes over to Rama's camp with his ministers.

Hanuman inspires Vibhishana to go over to Sri Rama. Derided and kicked by Ravana, he remembers Hanuman's words and decides to give up Ravana's company and take refuge in Sri Rama. Many a time it is the sorrow and misery of the world that take us to God; it is in the midst of suffering that we remember the words of saints and holy people. Here, Hanuman acts like the guru who takes the spiritual aspirant to God. On seeing Vibhishana approach Sri Rama's

camp, Sugriva suspects his motives—but Vibhishana holds on to Hanuman who unites him with Sri Rama. Tulsidas writes in his *Hanuman Chalisa*:

*Jay jay hanuman gosain
Kripa karahu gurudev ki nai.
Glory to Lord Hanuman!
Kindly be gracious like a guru.*²

What does a guru do? He unites the disciple with God. Hanuman showers his grace upon Tulsidas by enabling him to have the vision of Sri Rama. While living in Varanasi, after his daily dip in the Ganga, Tulsidas pours a little water at the root of a sacred banyan tree, uttering Sri Rama's name. A ghost happens to live on that tree. He is relieved of his predicament by the touch of Ganga water and by hearing Sri Rama's name every day. He appears

before Tulsidas and says, 'I shall be free after a few days due to your grace; and I would like to do something for the favour you have done to me. I am a ghost. I should be able to get you any worldly thing that you might need.' Tulsidas replies, 'I don't want anything. I seek only God. I will be blessed if you can make me see God.' It is interesting that while Ravana, despite having the vision of God, asks for worldly things, Tulsidas seeks God from a ghost, a worldly being. The ghost says, 'I am a mere ghost. I cannot possibly make you see God. However, I can tell you a way for that. Wherever Ramnam is sung, there Hanuman remains present':

*Yatra yatra raghunatha-kirtanam
Tatra tatra krita-mastakanjalim;
Vashpa-vari-paripurna-lochanam
Marutim namata-rakshasantakam.*

Hanuman

There moves through the Ramayana one being who, though also a monkey, is of a different order. In those parts of India where, as in the Himalayas or the interior of Maharashtra, the symbol[s] of primitive Hinduism still abound, little chapels of Hanuman are as common as those of Ganesha, and the ape, like the elephant, has achieved a singular and obviously age-old conventionalism of form. He is always seen in profile, vigorously portrayed in low relief upon a slab. The image conveys the impression of a complex emblem rather than of plastic realism. But there is no question as to the energy and beauty of the qualities for which he stands. It may be questioned whether there is in the whole of literature another apotheosis of loyalty and self-surrender like that of Hanuman. He is the Hindu ideal of the perfect servant, the servant who finds full realization of manhood, of faithfulness, of his obedience; the subordinate whose glory is in his own inferiority.

Hanuman must have been already ancient when the Ramayana was first conceived. What may have been the first impulse that created him it is now useless to guess. But he is linked to a grander order than that of Sugriva and Vali, the princes whom he serves, inasmuch as he,

like Jatayu, is said to be the son of Vayu, known in the Vedas as the god of the winds. In any case, the depth and seriousness of the part assigned to him in the great poem assure him of unfading immortality. Whatever may have been his age or origin, Hanuman is captured and placed by the Ramayana amongst religious conceptions of the highest import. When he bows to touch the foot of Rama, that Prince who is also a divine incarnation, we witness the meeting-point of early nature-worship with the great systems that are to sway the future of religion. But we must not forget that in this one figure those early systems have achieved the spiritual quality and made a lasting contribution to the idealism of man. In ages to come the religion of Vishnu, the preserver, will never be able to dispense with that greatest of devotees, the monkey-god; and even in its later phases, when Garuda—the divine bird, who haunted the imagination of all early peoples—has taken his final place as the vehicle, or attendant of Narayana, Hanuman is never really displaced. The wonderful creation of Valmiki will retain to the end of time his domination over the hearts and consciences of men.

—Sister Nivedita,

in *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*, 20–1

Wherever Raghunatha's glory is sung, there he (Hanuman) is, eyes full of tears, joined palms raised to the head. Salute the demon-destroyer, Maruti.

He adds, 'There is a Rama temple nearby. There Ramnam is sung every day. An old man, stick in hand, is the first to arrive there and last to leave. He is none other than Hanuman.' Tulsidas is quick to catch hold of the old man. Though he does not agree about his identity in the beginning, seeing Tulsidas's earnestness he reveals his true form. Tulsidas requests Hanuman to grant him the vision of Sri Rama. Hanuman asks him to go to the Chitrakuta hills, assuring him of the desired vision there. Tulsidas goes to Chitrakuta, builds a hut to stay, and starts spiritual practices. One day, when he is preparing sandal paste, a small boy of dark complexion comes and says, 'Uncle, give me a little sandal paste.' 'No, I can't give it to you. I am preparing this for my lord, Sri Rama,' Tulsidas replies. The boy implores again, but Tulsidas is adamant in his refusal. Then the boy proceeds to take some of the sandal paste himself and apply it on his own forehead. Just then a parrot sings out from a nearby tree:

*Chitrakut ke ghat par bhai santan ki bhir;
Tulsidas chandan ghase tilak kare raghubir.*

On the riverfront of Chitrakut there is a great gathering of saints; Tulsidas grinds sandal while Sri Rama applies tilak.

That was Hanuman again in disguise—he understood that Tulsidas could not recognize Sri Rama and so decided to help him. Tulsidas was overwhelmed and fell at Sri Rama's feet. Sugriva also could not recognize Sri Rama; Hanuman helped him too. Vibhishana also was sceptical about Sri Rama accepting him until Hanuman removed his doubt.

When Vibhishana approaches him, Sri Rama discusses with Sugriva how he is to be received. Sugriva is of the opinion that Vibhishana ought to be taken captive. Sri Rama replies, 'You have reasoned astutely. But I have taken a vow to dispel

fear from all who take refuge in me.' Hanuman is delighted to hear this, 'The Lord is like a loving father to refuge-seekers.' Sri Rama continues, 'Even if one has killed crores of holy men, I accept him if he surrenders to me.'

Vibhishana prostrates himself before Sri Rama saying, 'O Lord, save me, save me.' Sri Rama lifts him up and holds him in tight embrace. Sugriva wanted him to tie Vibhishana down, but Sri Rama went one better: he tied Vibhishana's heart tight with the chord of love, holding him captive for all time.

Sri Rama makes Vibhishana sit by his side and says to him, 'I know everything about you. I know how you were in Lanka and how you endured suffering and sorrow.' While approaching Sri Rama, Vibhishana might have had the thought that once he helped Sri Rama defeat Ravana, he would become the king of Lanka. But after having Sri Rama's darshan, his mind is expunged of all such thought:

*Ur kachhu pratham vasna rahi
Prabhu-pad priti sarit so bahi.*

I had some desire in my heart, at first. But the stream of devotion for the Lord's feet has washed it away (5.49.3).

The scriptures tell us that the Supreme is that by getting which everything is got; on obtaining which no other desire for gain remains. Vibhishana's desires also vanish, but the Lord knows everyone's heart well. He asks the monkeys to bring some sea water and coronates Vibhishana with the following words:

*Jadapi sakha tav ichchha nahin
Mor darasu amogh jag mahi.*

O Friend! Though you have no desire, my vision never fails in bringing its rewards in this world.

Uprooting Ravana's

We thus see that, if we want God, we have to destroy at the outset the Ravana-like tendencies that are in us, give up the company of demonic people,

and stop helping and serving them.

Sri Ramakrishna's father Kshudiram had fallen prey to the anger of the landlord of Dere village. The landlord had pressured Kshudiram to bear false witness in his favour. Kshudiram did not agree. He had to forgo all his possessions and lost his hearth and home. All his property was usurped by the landlord; but he could not snatch away the real wealth Kshudiram possessed: his spirituality. Kshudiram did not help the Ravana-like landlord, hence the Divine took birth in his home.

Many of us do want to get rid of these demonic tendencies, but our old mental impressions do not permit us to do so. It is these tendencies that keep provoking lust, greed, anger, and delusion. Somehow these demons remain invincible. So, how do we drive them away? If only we could install God in our hearts, they would not be able to stay there. Swami Yogananda had once asked a similar question of Sri Ramakrishna: 'How can lust be overcome?' Sri Ramakrishna's biographer records:

In this connection we mention a story concerning Swami Yogananda. He was one of those rare persons who had complete self-control. One day at Dakshineswar he asked the Master the same question, how to conquer lust. He was then young, about fourteen or fifteen years old, and had been visiting the Master for a short while. At that time, Narayana, a hatha yogi, lived in the hut of the Panchavati at Dakshineswar and was attracting some people by performing *neti-dhauti*. Swami Yogananda said that he had been among those visitors. As he observed those performances, he thought that perhaps unless one practised these disciplines one could not overcome lust and see God. So after asking that question, he expected the Master to prescribe for him a particular yogic posture, or advise him to eat a *myrobalan* or some other thing, or to teach him a pranayama technique.

Yogananda later said: 'In answer to my question the Master said, "Go on repeating the name of Hari, then lust will go away." This answer was not at all to my liking. I thought: "He does not know any technique so he just said something to

pacify me. Does lust go away by chanting the name of Hari? So many people do that. Are they free from lust?" Then one day I came to the temple garden and instead of going to the Master I went to the Panchavati and eagerly began to listen to the hatha yogi talk. In the meantime, the Master arrived there. As soon as he saw me, he called me over and took my hand. While we were walking towards his room, he said: "Why did you go there? Don't go there anymore. If you learn and practise those techniques of hatha yoga, your mind will dwell on the body and will never turn towards God." At this, I thought: "He is telling me this lest I stop visiting him." I always considered myself to be highly intelligent, so my inflated intellect made me think that. It did not occur to me even once that it mattered very little to the Master whether I visited him or not. What a mean and doubtful mind I had! There was no limit to the Master's grace. In spite of my harbouring such erroneous notions in my mind, he gave me shelter. Then I thought: "Why don't I do what he told me and see what happens?" So resolved, I took the name of Hari with a concentrated mind. And as a matter of fact, within a few days I began to experience the tangible result that the Master had referred to."³

Sri Rama killed one Ravana—but there are still thousands of Ravana in our minds. Therefore, Sri Rama again incarnated in the form of Sri Ramakrishna and showed us the way to kill these Ravana. We come across these means on each and every page of the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Our hearts will turn into Ayodhya, Mathura, and Kamarpukur if we can kill the demons dwelling therein. God will incarnate there; our lives will be made meaningful through participation in his play. Hence, I pray, 'O Lord, protect us from these dreadful demons.' ❧

References

1. Tulsidas, *Ramcharitmanas*, 1.177.1.
2. Tulsidas, *Hanuman Chalisa*, 37.
3. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society, 2003), 402–3.

Beauty and Mysticism in the Saundaryalahari

Dr Minati Kar

AESTHETES EQUATE BEAUTY with the Sanskrit term *saundarya*—with *cārutva*, being pleasing, *camatkāra*, charm, and *cittavistāra*, expansion of mind. When we speak of beauty, we must speak of the experience of *rasa*, the poetic sentiment. Jagannatha conceives of beauty as dispassionate supramundane pleasure resulting from the aesthetic experience. The *Agni Purana* raises beauty to a high status, equating the experience of aesthetic beauty with the luminous sentience of the soul, *ātma-caitanya*. In his remarkable work *Saundaryalahari*, Acharya Shankara corroborates this view by equating beauty with the bliss aspect of non-dual Brahman. Therefore, beauty is not temporal but divine.

Erotic mysticism involves love and beauty. And the expression of beauty is considered incomplete without being connected with the female form. Here we may be confronted with the question why the great sannyasin Shankara should concern himself with beauty and erotic mysticism? The answer lies in Shankara's conception of the Devi and the divine love-play between Shiva and Shakti, which he portrays in his excellent and incomparable poetic diction. He shows us how duality dwindles away with the awakening of non-dual consciousness. When the mind is totally concentrated through *saguṇopāsanā*, worship of the Divine with attributes, then *nirguṇopāsanā*, contemplation of the attributeless Divine, becomes possible.

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The non-dualistic outlook is the special feature of Vedanta and Tantra. But both adhere to relative dualism for connecting the objective world to the Supreme Being. In Advaita Vedanta relative dualism is projected through *maya*, while in Tantra it is envisaged in terms of Shiva and Shakti.

Shankara's main focus is on Brahman, the Absolute, which is described in the mystical language of the Upanishads. The focal point of the *Saundaryalahari*, meaning 'upsurge of the ocean of beauty', is also non-duality. It centres round the Devi, who is none other than the Kundalini Kamakala. In this hymn Shankara's efflorescent devotion to the Devi is revealed. This indicates duality. But as devotion advances, this seeming duality merges into non-duality.

Beauty

Shankara opens the hymn with the Tantric doctrine that Shiva is able to manifest himself only when united with Shakti—otherwise, he is not able even to pulsate. Shakti is all-powerful. Her gracious side glance, *krpā-katākṣa*, fulfils the desires of all who worship her. And it makes even the weak powerful:

*Dhanuḥ pauspaṁ maurvī
madhu-kara-mayī pañca viśikhāḥ
Vasantaḥ sāmanto malaya-marud
āyodhana-rathah;
Tathāpy-ekah sarvaṁ himagiri-sute
kām-api krpām
Apāṅgāt-te labdhvā jagad-idam
anaṅgo vijayate.*

O Daughter of the Himalayas! Obtaining a side glance from you, the bodyless Ananga, Cupid,

conquers the world with his flowery bow, bow-string made of honeybees, and five flowery darts, taking spring as minister and the southern breeze as chariot.¹

Beauty is the main theme of the present hymn. To portray this beauty Shankara has used many similes. Of these, the most prominent are the lotus, the rainbow, the chakora bird, and the crescent moon. Dawn, dusk, *bālātapa*, the new rising sun, and *aruṇa*, the magenta colour, are portrayed in the background, giving a kaleidoscopic nuance to beauty. The poet describes the Devi's glamour from the crest-jewel on her head to her lotus feet, bringing to light the upsurge of her beauty. He also portrays the erotic mysticism that is highlighted in the divine love-play of Shiva and Shakti. This, of course, is a daunting task. For:

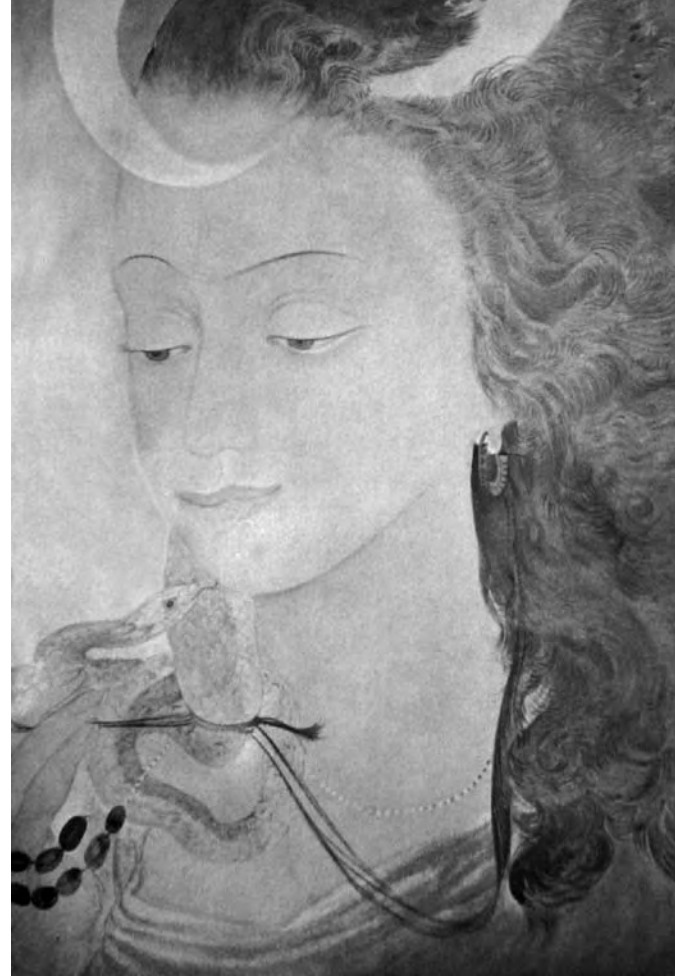
*Tvadiyaṃ saundaryaṃ
tuhina-giri-kanye tulayitum
Kavindrāḥ kalpante katham-api
viriñci-prabhṛtayaḥ.*

O Daughter of the Himalayas! The greatest of poets like Brahma, endeavouring to create your sublime portraiture, are unable to find anything comparable (to aid the description) (12).

The Devi's beauty can only be described through a process of 'neti, neti; not this, not this'. This implies that, teleologically, this transcendental beauty can be arrived at only through total negation of all relative beauty. In this hymn the Devi, who is Consciousness itself, is transformed from an anthropomorphic deity into formless Reality. This beauty, brilliantly crimson, shines as pure light discernible only to yogis: '*Bhajanti tvāṃ dhanyāḥ katicana cid-ānanda-laharīm*; there are some fortunate ones who meditate on you as the surging billow of mental joy' (8).

If one is to describe the Devi's beauty, one must seek her grace:

*Śaraj-jyotsnā-śuddhām
śaśi-jūta-jaṭā-jūta-makutām*



Uma, by Abanindranath Tagore

*Vara-trāsa-trāṇa-sphatika-
ghuṭikā-pustaka-karām;
Sakṛn-na tvā natvā katham-iva
satām sannidadhate
Madhu-kṣīra-drākṣā-madhurima-
dhurīṇāḥ phaṇitayaḥ.*

O Mother! You are as fair as the autumnal moon-beams, with the plaited hair on your head adorned by the crescent moon, your hands bearing gestures granting boons and refuge, a rosary of crystal beads, and a book. How could one become a great poet—whose words excel the savour of honey, milk, and grapes—without worshipping you even once! (15).

In the first forty-one verses Shankara describes the bliss derived from meditating on the Devi, but some worshippers are not able to meditate on her as a formless entity. Therefore, the poet passes on to a description of her brilliant gracious form.

*Gatair-māṇikyavatvaṁ gagana-maṇibhiḥ
sāndraghaṭitaṁ
Kīrītaṁ te haimaṁ himagiri-sute
kīrtayati yāḥ;
Sa nīde-yacchāyāc-churaṇa-śabalaṁ
candra-śakalam
Dhanuḥ śaunāsīraṁ kim-iti
na nibadhnāti dhiṣaṇām.*

(The Devi's crown is brilliantly lustrous, which enhances her loveliness.) O Daughter of the Himalayas! There are twelve Adityas—jewels of the sky—in your golden crown, and they are closely amalgamated with other jewels in the crown. When the shadow of the crown is reflected on the crescent moon (on your forehead), will it not generate the impression of Indra's bow (a rainbow) in the worshipper's mind? (42).

In verse forty-three the poet describes the Devi's hair as dense, glossy, and soft, *ghana-snigdha-ślakṣṇam*, resembling a thicket of blooming lotuses, *dalitendīvara-vanam*. Further:

*Tanotu kṣemaṁ nas-tava-
vadana-saundarya-laharī
Parīvāha-srotaḥ-saraṇir-iva
śimanta-saraṇiḥ;
Vahantī sindūraṁ prabala-kabarī-
bhāra-timira-
Dviṣāṁ bṛndair-bandī-kṛtaṁ-iva
navinārka-kiraṇam.*

May the surging beauty of your face augment our welfare. The parting of your hairline is like a stream carrying the overflowing waters of your beauty. It is bedecked with vermilion giving the impression of the tender rays of the morning sun being held in bondage by a powerful enemy: the dark masses of your hair (44).

The Devi's face, surrounded by curly locks, beautiful like a swarm of young honeybees, mocks the beauty of the mud-born lotus:

*Arālaiḥ svābhāvyaḍ alikalabha-saśribhir-alakaiḥ
Parītaṁ te vaktraṁ parihasati paṇkeruḥa-rucim* (45).

And her gentle smile is lit up by rows of bright

teeth, brilliant like lotus filaments, and whose fragrance intoxicates the honey-loving eyes of Shiva, Eros-burner:

*Dara-smere yasmin daśana-ruci-
kiṇṇjalka-rucire
Sugandhau mādyanti smara-dahana-caḥsur-
madhu-lihaḥ* (ibid.).

The eyes of Shiva fall on the perfumed smiling lotus-face of the Devi. The black bees, black hair, and bee-like beautiful eyes—*netrābhyāṁ madhukara-rucibhyāṁ*—portray the Devi as an outstanding receptacle of beauty (47).

*Lalāṭaṁ lāvanya-dyuti-vimalam-
ābhāti tava yat
Dvītyaṁ taṁ manye makūṭa-ghaṭitaṁ
candra-śakalam;
Viparyāsa-nyāsād ubhayaṁ-api
saṁbhūya ca mithaḥ
Sudhālepa-syūtiḥ parīnamati
rākā-himakarāḥ.*

Your charming lustrous forehead has the appearance of a second lunar crescent, like the one on your crown. Though they face opposite directions, were they to be connected by reversing their positions, (we would have) the full moon dripping ambrosia (46).

The resplendence of the Devi's countenance and its jewellery casts a mystical spell over the mind. The forehead surmised as the half-moon expresses the Sanskrit poetic figure of *utprekṣā*, simile. The mystique is enhanced by the *atiśayokti*, hyperbole, in the second half of the stanza. Together we have the poetic embellishment called *saṅkara*, variegated like the Devi's ornaments.

Shankara says that he is led to believe that the slightly arched eyebrows are the bow of Kamadeva and the bee-like eyes its bowstring: *Bhruvau bhugne kiñcid ... dhanur-manye savyetara-kara-grhitaṁ ratipateḥ* (47). The Devi's right eye is in essence the sun creating the day, the left eye is in spirit the moon creating the night, and the half-open third eye, like a half-open golden lotus-bud, creates the twilight:

Dr̥ṣṭir-dara-dalita-hemāmbuja-ruciḥ samādhatte sandhyāṁ divasa-nisayor-antara-carim (48).

Sanskrit poetics recognizes nine *rasas*, depicting different emotions in divergent situations: *śṛṅgāra*, love, *vīra*, heroism, *karuṇa*, pity, *raudra*, anger, *bhayānaka*, terror, *bībhatsa*, disgust, *adbhuta*, wonder, *hāsya*, laughter, and *śānta*, composed.

Shankara delineates these emotions in a stimulating way, depicting the Devi's varied sentiments. He says:

O Mother! Your glance towards Shiva is steeped in love, *śṛṅgārārdrā*, but it discloses disgust, *kut-sana*, for those alienated from him; for Ganga, who tends to usurp your place in Shiva's mind, it has anger, *roṣa*; while the acts of Shiva leave you amazed, *vismayavatī*; Hara's snakes elicit fear from you, *harāhibhyo bhūtā*; and the redness of your eyes suggest the heroic mood, the harbinger of fortune, *saubhāgya-janani*. Towards your female friends you sport a jestful smile, *smera*; and towards me yours is the glance of compassion, *sakaruṇā* (51).

Thus, the Devi's glance is the receptacle of all *rasas*. Such a marvellous act is possible only for the Devi.

The poet describes the Devi's dazzling large eyes reaching up to the ears, feather-like eyelashes disturbing the profound placidity of Hara's mind, nose resembling pearl drops, and lips like the ripe bimba fruit. Then he sings the glory of her tongue:

Aviśrāntam patyur-guṇa-gaṇa-kathāmrēḍana-japā Japā-puṣpac-chāyā tava janani jihvā jayati sā.

Incessantly glorifying the virtues of your lord, your tireless tongue assumes the lustre of the red hibiscus flower (64).

Shankara wishes to remind us that incessant utterance of the virtues of the Lord is equivalent to worshipping him with unuttered words: 'The rudeness of your tongue is so intense that Saraswati, the goddess of speech of white lustre who dwells on your tongue, has her complexion turned into that of a ruby' (ibid.).

He next compares the Devi's neck to a lotus stalk, *mukha-kamalanāla-śriyam* (68). The lotus stalk has bristles, and the Devi's neck also bristles with horripilation at the touch of Shambhu. The lotus stalk, though white, is smeared grey with mud; similarly the Devi's pearl necklace is smeared with fragrant Agarū paste, *kālāgaru-bahula-jambāla-malinā* (68), enhancing the simile.

'(O Devi!) The three lines in your throat are the signs of fortune in women, and they are indicative of your musical voice.' Once Shiva severed one of Brahma's heads as punishment for deceit. The lotus-born Brahma being afraid of further punishment 'keeps singing, with his (remaining) four heads, (O Devi,) the praises of your four tender upper limbs granting refuge: *Mṛṇālī-mṛdvīnām tava bhuja-latānām catasṛṇām caturbbhiḥ saundaryam saras-ija-bhavaḥ stauti vadanaiḥ* (70). 'O Uma! Pray tell us how we can portray the splendour of your hands, the radiant lustre of whose fingernails put to shame the shine of the newly bloomed lotus at dawn' (71). It is these hands that bestow refuge to the seeker.

The Devi is not only the protector of her devotees; she nourishes them in every way:

Dayāvatyā dattaṁ dramila-śiśur āsvādya tava yat Kavīnām praudhānām-ajani kamanīyaḥ kavayitā.

By drinking the milk you provided with great compassion, the Dravida child became a noted poet among reputed composers (75).

Śrutīnām mūrdhāno dadhati tava yau śekharatayā Mamāpy-etau mātāḥ śirasi dayayā dbehi carānau; Yayoh pādyam pāthah paśupati-jatā-jūta-taṭinī Yayor-lākṣā-lakṣmīr-aruṇa-hari-cūḍāmaṇi-ruciḥ.

O Mother! Place your twin feet, which are revered by the Shrutis and worn by them as crest-jewels, on my head. The offerings of water to these feet of yours go to form the Ganga, and the red lac dye that decorates it adds to the beauty of Vishnu's diadem! (84).

Shankara gives high value to the Mother's lotus feet. He speaks of three drawbacks of ordinary

lotuses blooming in lakes. They are devastated by frost and snow, they close down at night, and they are the abode of Lakshmi, whose favours are fleeting. But the Devi's lotus feet move freely on Himalaya's snowy peaks, are abloom day and night, and, being the support of Lakshmi herself, they constantly generate the welfare of devotees (87).

*Namo-vākaṁ brūmo nayana-ramaṇīyāya padayoh
Tavāsmāi dvandvāya sphuṭa-rucira-sālaktakavate.*

Let us say with words that we offer our salutation to these twin feet brilliantly coloured with lac, appearing delightfully resplendent to the eyes (85).

The poet then amorously brings in Kamadeva, Ishana's foe, 'who is acclaiming his triumph in the jingle of your anklets, *tulā-koti-kvāṇaiḥ kili-kilitam īśāna-ripuṇā*', when Shiva is kicked on the forehead by the Devi for calling her by the wrong name. Of course, Shiva always longs for the blessed touch of her magenta feet (86).

These divine feet are bestowers of plenty to the needy, ridiculing the glory of the wish-fulfilling tree in the liberal distribution of the honey of beauty, *saundarya-prakara-makarandam vikirati* (90). But, more important, they grant deliverance from the bondage of samsara, which is the goal of Vedanta:

*Bhayāt trātum dātum phalam-api
ca vāñchā-samadhikam
Śaraṇye lokānām tava hi
caraṇāv-eva nipuṇau.*

Your feet are skilled in affording refuge to the worlds, in delivery from fear, and in giving much more than what is prayed for (4).

Mysticism

Mysticism has been defined as 'the immediate feeling of the unity of the Self with God'. Upanishadic mysticism centres round the concept that Brahman, being beyond sense perception, is hidden in the deep cavern that is the human heart. In *Saundaryalahari*, keeping his Advaitic stance, Shankara has introduced erotic mysticism, entwined with beauty, as the central theme. Shankara speaks of

beauty reflected in emotion that crosses the limits of temporality to become one with the ultimate Truth. For eroticism to culminate in the dignity of mysticism, it must transcend temporal love and commune with God, the ultimate Reality.

Shankara tells us that by meditating on the transcendental glory of the Devi, poets are able to compose profound poetry elevated to mystical heights:

*Kavīndrāṇām cetah-kamala-vana-
bālātapa-ruciṁ
Bhajante ye santah katicid-aruṇām-
eva bhavatīm;
Virīñci-preyasyās-taruṇatara
śṛṅgāra-laharī-
Gabhīrābhir-vāgbhir-vidadhātī satām
rañjanam-amī.*

O Devi, of magenta hue! You are like the tender light of dawn to the lotus thickets that are the minds of gifted poets. Those who worship you delight the assemblies of wise men with their profound flow of erotic diction emerging from the youthful Saraswati, Brahma's beloved spouse (16).

Shankara calls this beauty *aruṇa*. By exclusive meditation on the *aruṇā* Devi in the lotus of the heart, poets gain wisdom. The eroticism described here is mystical, *gabhīra śṛṅgāra*.

Tracing the Tantric way, the author shows how the Devi, who is none other than the power that is Kundalini, starting from the Muladhara centre and piercing the intermediate chakras in succession, reaches the thousand-petalled lotus at the crown of the head and sports with Shiva, the fount of knowledge: '*Sahasrāre padme saha rahasi patyā viharase; you sport with your Lord in the solitude of the Sahasrara*' (9). She then retraces her path, the *kulapatha*, to rest in the hollow of the Kulakunda at the lower end of the Shushumna, like a serpent rolled up in three and a half coils. Shankara extols the Devi as having a universal form, *viśvavapu: 'Tvameva svātmānam pariṇamayitum viśva-vapuṣā cidānandākāram śivayuvati-bhāvena bibhṛṣe; it is to transform yourself into the universe that you assume this form of Consciousness-Bliss as Shiva's consort*' (35).

The sport of Knowledge and Power is brought home through elegant imagery:

*Samunmilat-samvit-
kamala-makarandaika rasikam
Bhaje haṁsa-dvandvaṁ
kim-api mahatām mānasa-caram.*

I adore the incomparable pair of swans (Shiva and Shakti) who are adept at drinking the honey of the blooming lotus of the heart centre while they glide in the minds of the great ones (38).

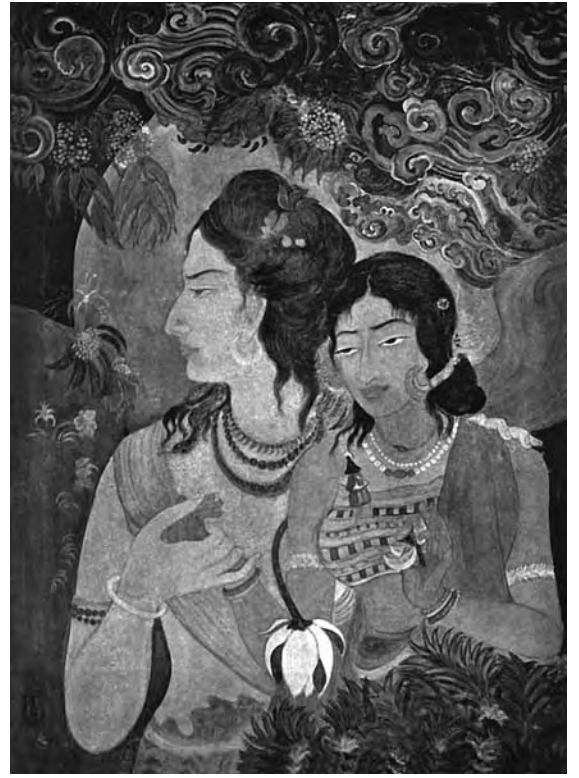
In the word *haṁsaḥ*, *haṁ* represents the male principle, Shiva, and *saḥ* the female Shakti. The terms also remind us that every syllable is charged with mystical power derived from the Devi. The mythical swan, *haṁsa*, is reputed to have the capacity for separating milk from water, which is representative of discerning wisdom. The divine pair, known as Hamseshwara and Hamseshwari, are to be meditated upon for this discerning insight. But, in the ultimate analysis, it is the Devi that is all-powerful:

*Gatās-te mañcatvaṁ
druhiṇa-hari-rudreśvara-bhṛtaḥ
Śivaḥ svacchac-chāyā-
ghaṭita-kapaṭa-pracchada-paṭaḥ;
Tvadiyānām bhāsām
prati-phalana-rāgāruṇatayā
Śarīri śṛṅgāro rasa iva
dṛśām dogdhi kutukam.*

(O Mother!) You are sitting on a couch formed by the four gods Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, and Ishvara, with Shiva—with his white hue—acting as its cover. Reflecting your crimson radiance, Shiva, the very embodiment of the erotic sentiment, milks joy from your eyes (92).

Elsewhere, Shankara has dealt with the concept of Ardhanarishwara, of Shiva and Shakti sharing a single form. He goes on to show how the Devi slowly engulfs Shiva's body:

*Tvayā hṛtvā vāmam
vapur-aparitṛptena manasā*



Hara-Parvati, by Pratima Devi

*Śarīrārdham śambhor-
aparam-api śaṅke hṛtam-abhūt;
Yad-etat tvadrūpaṁ
sakalam-aruṇābham trinayanam
Kucābhyām-ānamram
kuṭila-śaśi-cūḍāla-makuṭam.*

Having absorbed the left half of Shambhu's body, you still seem unsatisfied; I suspect the other half of his frame has also been invaded: for your whole person now appears crimson, three-eyed, with bosom weighed down, and with the crescent moon as crown (23).

Shiva and Shakti are one. Shiva is fair-complexioned, crowned with the crescent moon, and possessed of the third eye of wisdom. With the Devi exercising mastery over Shiva, his colour turns crimson, the symbol of *rajas*, activity. When the process is complete, what remains of Shiva is the third eye and the crescent moon, which is now shared by the Devi. The Devi's overwhelming presence is symbolized by the eternal feminine principle, the crimson glory. The whole universe shines in this glorious magenta: *Divam sarvām-urvīm-*



Ardhanarishwara, Chaitanyadeva Chattopadhyaya

arunimani-magnām (18).

But it is not merely in the manifest universe that the Devi reigns supreme. She is the Supreme in her transcendent aspect:

*Girāmāhur-devīm
druhiṇa-grhinīm-āgamavido
Hareḥ patnīm padmām
hara-sahacarīm-adri-tanayām;
Turīyā kāpi tvam
duradhigama-nissīma-mahimā
Mahā-māyā viśvaṁ
bhramayasi para-brahma-maḥiṣi.*

O Queen of Supreme Brahman! Knowers of the Vedas call you Saraswati, the goddess of word and spouse of the Creator, they also speak of you as Padma, the consort of Vishnu, as well as the mountain daughter who is Shiva's consort. But you are Mahamaya, a mysterious fourth entity of inaccessible limitless splendour that keeps the universe going (97).

The Devi's devotees are also unique, for 'with their bondage of jivahood, born of beginningless ignorance, severed, they remain immersed in the supreme bliss of Brahman even while living': *Ciram jivanneva*

*kṣapita-paśu-pāśa-vyatikaraḥ parānandābhikhyam
rasayati rasam tvad-bhajanavān* (99). The devoted yogi reaches this state of *jivanmukti*, freedom while living, by worshipping the Devi. This highest state of bliss is also the highest emancipation. The poet prays for this favour: 'O Consort of Shiva! You graciously bathe me with your far-reaching compassionate glance, which will enable me to reach the *summum bonum* of existence; this will not affect you in any way, *anenāyam dhanyo bhavati na ca te hānir-iyatā*' (57).

Thus, in this hymn we see Shankara first project the bliss aspect of the ultimate Reality, next relate it to the Shakti highlighted by the Tantric tradition of Srichakra, and then describe the Devi's brilliant form in its fullest glory. He concludes with the message of the eternal feminine principle as Advaita, projecting the Devi as the immanent *arunā* as well as the formless principle pervading the whole universe and shining as pure Consciousness in the minds of devotees. We thus have an excellent blend of Tantra and Vedanta presented through masterly poetry.

And in his final obeisance Shankara acknowledges that even this composition is nothing but a play of the Devi:

*Pradīpa-jvālābhīr-
divasa-kara-nīrājana-vidhiḥ
Sudhā-sūteś-candropala-
jala-lavair-arghya-racanā;
Svakīyair-ambhobhiḥ
sālila-nidhi-sauhitya-karaṇam
Tvadīyābhīr-vāgbhis-
tava-janani vācām stutir-iyam.*

O Mother! Composing this hymn in your praise, originating from your own words, is like propitiating the sun with a lamp, offering oblation to the moon with water emanating from the moonstone, and appeasing the sea with its own waters (100).

PB

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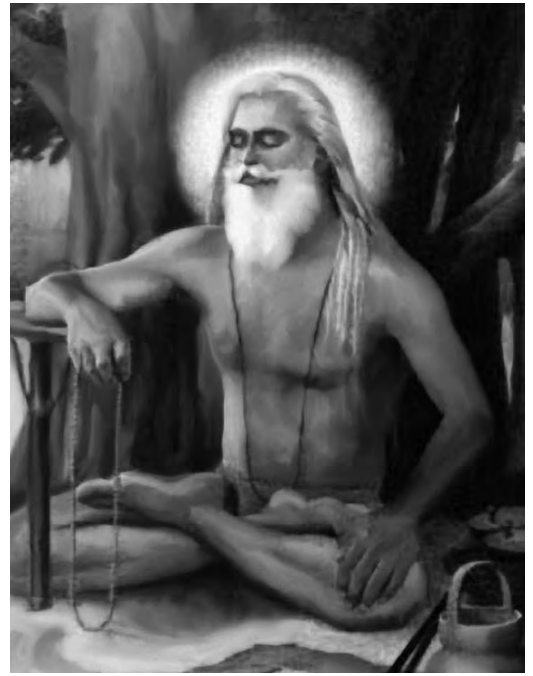
Vedanta: A North Indian Perspective

A P N Pankaj

It would be wrong to confine the word Vedanta only to one system which has arisen out of the Upanishads. All these [Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita] are covered by the word Vedanta. ... What we really mean by the word Hindu is really the same as Vedantist. ... You must not believe that Shankara was the inventor of the Advaita system. It existed ages before Shankara was born; he was one of its last representatives. So with the Vishishtadvaita system; it has existed ages before Ramanuja appeared, as we already know from the commentaries he has written; so with the dualistic systems that have existed side by side with the others. ...

Just as in the case of the six Darshanas, we find they are a gradual unfolding of the grand principles whose music beginning far back in the soft low notes, ends in the triumphant blast of the Advaita, so also in these three systems we find the gradual working up of the human mind towards higher and higher ideals till everything is merged in that wonderful unity which is reached in the Advaita system.¹

‘THE GREAT INDO-GANGETIC PLAIN’, says K M Panikkar, ‘lies to the south of this [Himalayan] range. Washed by the waters of the great rivers, it has always been the core of the Indian continent. The fertilising waters of the Panchnad—the five rivers—and the Jumna and the Ganges led to the development of agriculture and the consequent growth of population in this area. Town and village communities grew up along the river, valleys and converted this area into a seat of



Sri Srichandracharya

civilization. Aryavarta has always been the centre of Indian life ... It is the true making of India.’²

It was then in this part of Aryavarta—which witnessed a ‘gradual expansion to cover the whole continent’ (3)—that the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-gita, and the *Brahma Sutra* of Badarayana Vyasa were pronounced. Together they constitute the *prasthāna-traya*, the threefold scriptures which are the basis of the philosophical system popularly known as Vedanta, the end and essence of the Vedas: *vedānām antaḥ sārabbhūtaḥ*.

While from North India sprang this great literature which travelled across the Vindhyas to Dakshinapatha, South India, from the latter came the great exponents, the cult figures of Vedanta: Shankara from Kerala, Ramanuja from Tamil Nadu, and Madhva from Karnataka. They gave us the three systems of Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita respectively, establishing thus the cultural unity of Bharatvarsha—*himavat-setu-paryantam*, from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean.

In the light of the foregoing, it would perhaps be inappropriate to compartmentalize Vedanta into either particular interpretations or particular regions—the North, the South, the East, or the West.

The author is a *littérateur* of repute from Chandigarh.

Vedanta represents the core of the entire Hindu thought across spatial limits. Yet, if in this essay we speak of the northern perspectives, it is only to denote some of the important seers and sages of North India who, in the last five centuries, have given us their understanding and interpretations based on *śruti-pramāṇa*, scriptural authority, and *anubhava*, intrinsic experience. Such luminaries are legion; however, we shall deliberate on only a few of them here, given the limitations of space.

Sri Srichandracharya: Jñāna-bhakti-samuccaya

*Kahu re bāl! Kis ne mūṇḍā kis ne mūṇḍāyā
Kis kā bhejā nagarī āyā
Sadguru mūṇḍā lekh mūṇḍāyā
Guru kā bhejā nagarī āyā
Cetahu nagarī tārāhu gāmū
Alakh puruṣ kā simarāhu nāmū
Guru avināśī khel racāyā
Āgam nīgam kā panth batāyā.*

Who, O kid, has shaven your head [imparted *vairāgya*, *dīkṣā*, and *ātma-jñāna* to you]? At whose behest have you arrived in this city?

The *sad-guru*, spiritual master, has shaven my head; impressions of my past lives have caused this shave. Commanded by the Master have I come here with his instruction to awaken the cities and redeem the villages and perpetually repeat the name of the Invisible Being. Avinashi Muni, my guru, has playfully explained to me the path of the Vedas and the Shastras.³

Thus begins the *Matrashastra* of Acharya Shrichandra, the most authoritative exposition of the Udasina order's philosophy of life. It is said that the acharya dispensed the *Matrashastra* and his *vāṇī*, teachings, in a state of samadhi to Almast Sahib, Phul Sahib, Balu Hasna Sahib, and Goind Sahib and thus the Udasina order came into existence.⁴ This order reposes complete faith in the Vedas and Puranas, and places emphasis on the path of yoga (308). Its followers consider the *Matrashastra*—having thirty-nine *chaupai* verses—a work of revelation and hold it in the same regard as the

Sikhs do the Japuji of Guru Nanak. The term *mātrā*, in this context, could be interpreted in the following ways:

i) *Mīyante ābhiḥ iti mātrā*: this definition has been extended to mean all those instruments, external and internal, that help the attainment of divine knowledge.⁵

ii) By following the injunctions of the *Matrashastra*, one is delivered from the tyranny of maya: *mā māyā; tasyāstrāyate sā mātrā*.⁶

iii) According to some interpreters, *mātrā* points to the necessity of adopting all the measures that help in subduing the mind and attaining moksha.

iv) The particle *mā* also means 'intrinsic mystery'. Only when spiritual aspirants are free from external ostentation can they attain *jivanmukti*, freedom while living in the human body (ibid.).

The acharya concludes the *Matrashastra* by saying that being steadfast in these instructions one attains to the knowledge of the ultimate Reality and no longer suffers from the pangs of birth and death:

*Jugat pachāne tattva virole
Aisī mātrā lai pahire koy
Āvāgaman miṭāve soy.*⁷

In spite of himself being a thorough scholar of Sanskrit language and scriptures, the acharya chose the Sadhukkari dialect of Hindi to compose his *Matrashastra*; his intention was to facilitate its understanding by his followers who, in the beginning, belonged to Punjab and Sindh. It is believed, however, that in the *chaupais* of this scripture there are hidden mystic meanings which can be deciphered only with the help and blessings of a competent guru.

Acharya Shrichandra was born on the ninth day of the bright fortnight of the Vikrama year 1551 (1494 CE) at Talwandi, a village sixty miles west of Lahore. He was the son of Guru Nanak and Sulakshna Devi. He had his academic education under Sri Purushottam Kaul, and his spiritual Master was Avinashi Muni. Since Guru Nanak spent several years in intermittent pilgrimages—called *udāsīs*—

Srichandra spent most of his childhood with his mother, in the house of his maternal grandparents. Even as a child, he spent several hours and days in samadhi, discoursing on spiritual issues, and answering questions that removed the doubts of aspirants as well as of those who wished to test his authenticity. He traversed large parts of the country meeting and inspiring several people, including personages like Maharana Pratap, Bhama Shah, Emperor Jahangir, and Samarth Ramdas, the guru of Chhatrapati Shivaji. He made a great number of disciples, especially in north-west India and in Sindh. He lived for a hundred and forty-nine years and had his mahasamadhi in the caves of Chamba Hills. In some accounts it is also mentioned that Guru Nanak himself supervised his *upanayana*, sacred thread ceremony, and arranged for his study of the ancient scriptures.

Varying accounts are available of the acharya adopting the path of renunciation, which was different from the path followed by his father—and the followers of Sikh Panth—who led the life of a householder. According to some descriptions, Guru Nanak himself divided his spiritual legacy between Guru Angad, who was anointed the second Sikh Guru, and Baba Srichandra, who took to the monastic path at his father's behest and became a monastic preceptor.⁸ According to another tradition, the acharya disagreed with the views of his father from the beginning. The acharya's temperament was essentially that of a renunciant. Moreover, while Guru Nanak did not attach much importance to *varṇāśrama dharma*, caste rules, the acharya not only believed in it but also preached it.⁹ Even 'according to the Sikh tradition ... Siri Chand rejected Nanak's insistence upon the futility of asceticism as a necessary means of salvation. The ascetic path of celibacy and austerities was, it seems, the mode of salvation affirmed by Siri Chand.'¹⁰ An unseemly obduracy also seems to exist in some quarters to prove that there was a mutual perception of threat between Sikhs and Udasins, and early steps were taken by the Sikhs to contain the spread of the ideal of renunciation while laying stress on

leading a householder's life.¹¹ The incontrovertible fact, however, remains that in the Udasina order Guru Nanak is held in the highest esteem, and the Adi Granth is respected on a par with the Vedas, Shastras, and other ancient spiritual literature of the Hindus. J D Cunningham noted that the members of this order 'are proud of their connexion with Sikhs and all reverence, and most possess and use, the Granth of Nanak'.¹²

The Udasina order traces its *guru-paramparā*, spiritual lineage, to Bhagavan Shiva, who initiated Sanatkumara, one of the foursome sage children and spiritual sons of Brahma. Sanatkumara in turn initiated the sage Narada.¹³ Thus, in this tradition, Sanatkumara represents *jñāna-mārga*; Narada, *bhakti-mārga*; and Shiva, the Lord of Yogis, the greatest among jnanis as well as bhaktas, is the ultimate symbol of yoga, jnana, and bhakti, all three together. It is said that Avinashi Muni, the acharya's guru, was the hundred and sixty-fourth guru in this tradition.

Apart from the *Matrashastra*, several other works in Sanskrit and Hindi have been attributed to Acharya Srichandra: *Panchadevashtaka*, *Matrabhasma Gayatri*, *Srichandra Siddhantamanjari*, *Srichandra Siddhantasangraha*—a compilation of thirty-one big and small works—among others. It is also said the acharya authored a comprehensive commentary on the Vedas, *Chandrabbhashya*:

*Śrīmānataḥ param-udāratayā manasvī
Vedānta-vedya paramātmā-vicāra niṣṭhaḥ;
Lokopakāra-manasā nigamodīta-śrīr-
Āviścakāra nigameṣu navīna-bhāṣyam.*

[After conquering his opponents in debates on the interpretation of scriptures] the glorious, liberal, and learned acharya, who was well versed in Vedantic lore and settled in the thoughts of the Supreme Being, brought forth a new commentary on the Vedas [*Chandrabbhashya*], for the good of the people.¹⁴

In his *Matrashastra*, the acharya uses as symbols the external garb, dress, and appearance of a yogi or a monk and places emphasis on a virtuous,

unblemished life. A yogi is one whose mind is concentrated on Brahman, he has conquered his senses and leads a life of continence and contentment, abstaining strictly from *kāma*, lust, and *kāñcana*, greed. Great stress is laid upon *mano-nigraha*, subduing the mind. Having risen above 'I-ness' and 'thou-ness', he has attained equanimity; he has no fear from anything or anyone. In the love of God, he dances with joy. He has attained liberation from the three *guṇas* and is settled in the pure state of *sattva*—*nitya sattvasthaḥ*. Studied carefully and between the lines, the *Matrashastra* reminds us of the passages of the Gita where mention is made of the states of a *sthitaprajña*, of a yogi, and of a bhakta.¹⁵

While a householder, according to the Udasina tenets, can be part of the order—and there are a large number of householders initiated into this order—they cannot be gurus, being inevitably attached to sense objects. This also implicitly means that an Udasina guru, like the acharya himself, has to be true to the ideals stated by Shankaracharya in his *Vivekachudamani*.¹⁶

The acharya attaches equal importance to the paths of bhakti and jnana, tempered by *nivṛtti*, the state of quietude. The path of an Udasina—the term literally means 'indifferent' and contextually refers to indifference to all things material—is one of *jñāna-bhakti-samuccaya*, combination of knowledge and devotion. It is through *bhagavat-kṛpā*, God's grace, that one is blessed with bhakti. God is formless and without attributes as well as with form and attributes. One moves from lower to higher levels of bhakti, eventually reaching a state where all perceived duality between the devotee, his or her devotion, and the Divine disappears. This is the state of *aparokṣānubhava*, direct experience, the realization of '*aham brahmāsmi*; I am Brahman'.

To attain this state—or even to attain God's grace—*guru-kṛpā*, the grace of the guru, is a prerequisite. At the same time, guru's grace is possible only through the grace of God. One may also say that these two are coterminous. Equally important

is *ātma-kṛpā*, the grace of one's own mind; in other words, self-effort and a sustained yearning to realize God.

The acharya was a strong adherent of divine incarnations. In his Hindi poems, he refers with love to various incarnations such as Kurma, Nrisimha, Parashurama, Rama, and Krishna (94–5, 99, 101).

Panchadevashtaka is an important Sanskrit work of the acharya. This has five hymns wherein Ganesha, Shiva, Surya, Durga, and Krishna are eulogized. It is not just a devotional piece; it also acquaints us with the acharya's aesthetic, emotional, and poetic sides. Here is a verse from his *Srikrishnashtaka*:

*Kalau malaughāhata loka-rakṣakam
Vrajāṅganānām navaṇita-bhākṣakam;
Dhanāñjaya-syandana-yogarākṣakam
Namāmi kṛṣṇam yaduwaṁśanāyakam.*

Obeisance to Sri Krishna, the lord of the Yadava dynasty, redeemer of people stricken by the impurities of Kali Yuga, consumer of the fresh butter made by the maidens of Vraja, and the saviour of Arjuna's chariot as well as yoga.

The universe is rooted in Brahman. From Brahman it is born, in Brahman it stays, in Brahman it dissolves.¹⁷ The human being is a conglomerate of fourteen *tattvas*, elements: five organs of action, five sense organs, vital breath, mind, intellect, and *citta*—the object oriented consciousness—and of three varieties of ego: *sāttvika*, *rājasika*, and *tāmasika*. The eighteenth element is the jiva, eternally conscious—*nitya cetana*. The jiva is different from the fourteen elements and the three egoities; it is a fraction or fragment of the Supreme Being.¹⁸ Jiva, samsara, and Brahman are interrelated like the bubble, the wave, and the underlying ocean.¹⁹

Maya is indefinable, without beginning and end. It consists of the three *guṇas*, deludes the jiva, and is difficult to overcome except by God's grace.²⁰ This phenomenal world is a manifestation of Brahman and dissolves in it, just like the thread spun out and withdrawn again by the spider.²¹

Sant Nishchaldas:**Uncompromising Non-dualism**

In the North Indian Advaitic tradition Sant Nishchaldas's is a name that commands great respect. Author of the *Vicharsagar*, Nishchaldas was a profound scholar of Sanskrit language who, by his own admission, had thoroughly studied grammar, Sankhya, Nyaya, the entire literature of Advaita Vedanta, the Vedas, and other complex works of divergent doctrines, and yet opted for a vernacular medium to write *Vicharsagar* so that those unable to understand Sanskrit may also attain moksha by following this treatise:

*Sāṅkhya nyāy meṁ śram kiyo paḍhi vyākaraṇ aśeṣ
Paḍhe granth advait ke rahyo na ekahu śeṣ.
Kaṭhin ju aur nibandh hain, jin meṁ mat ko
bhed
Śram te avagāhan kiye niścaldās saved.
Tin yah bhāṣā granth kiye raṁch na upajī lāj
Tā meṁ yah ik hetu hai dayā dharm śirtāj.
Bin vyākaraṇ na paḍhi sakain granth saṁskṛt
mand
Paḍhai yahī anayās hī lahai so paramānand.²²*

As one traverses through the passages of *Vicharsagar*, one cannot but observe the author's depth of erudition shining through them—it is said that while writing it he did not consult any other work but went straight on as one would do while writing a simple spontaneous piece.

The details of Nishchaldas's date and place of birth are not known. Apart from the aforementioned autobiographical details, the few other facts available include the following: (i) between the age of fourteen and sixty, or seventy, he remained immersed in the study of the Shastras; (ii) Sri Dadudayal was his guru and Nishchaldas pays obeisance to him in *Vicharsagar* after concluding each of the seven sections thereof; (iii) he is the author of *Vritti-prabhakara*, another important Vedantic work in Hindi, and it is also said that he wrote a commentary on the *Katha Upanishad* in Sanskrit and a treatise on Ayurveda; (iv) he taught Advaita Vedanta to his students many times over,

but refused to teach Nyaya or any other subject in the mornings saying that he would not begin the day with a discourse on *anātma tattva*, matters of non-self; (v) *Vicharsagar* was completed by him in Kidhauri village—approximately thirty-six miles west of Delhi; (vi) he lived mainly in Kashi, but for some time also sojourned in Bundi, Rajasthan, in the court of Raja Ram Singh who, along with his wife, had become his disciple; (vii) he left his mortal frame in 1864.²³

Sri Dadudayal (1544–1603) is, like Kabir and Nanak, a cult figure, and his followers are known as Dadupanthis. Although his major field of work was Rajasthan, his followers today are spread across the country. Even those who are not Dadupanthis remember him with great reverence. His fame and influence had extended to far off Bengal—he finds mention in one Baul song—and in Maharashtra, where Sants Eknath and Tukaram have made respectful reference to him. It is not possible here to go into the details of his life, work, and philosophy.²⁴ The purpose of making this passing reference to Dadudayal is to mention that while Nishchaldas is an uncompromising non-dualist, his guru Dadu, also an adherent of the path of Brahman without attributes, often sang of *saguṇa-sākāra īśvara*, God with form and attributes, and advocated a syncretic approach to realize God, combining both jnana and bhakti. His followers consider him an avatara, which also confirms their belief in divine incarnations.

Underlining the subject matter and objectives of writing the *Vicharsagar*, the author says:

*Jīv brahma kī ekatā khat viṣaya jana buddhi
Tin ko je antar lahaiṁ te matimand abuddhi.
Paramānand svarūp kī prāpti prayojan jāni
Jagat samūl anarth puni hvai tāki ati hāni.*

The subject matter of this work is the identity of the individual self with the Supreme Spirit. Those who contend difference between them are dumb-witted and unwise.

Realization of the highest felicity, which is one's true Self, and removal of ignorance, which is the root cause of this universe, are the objectives.²⁵

Vicharsagar, written in archaic Hindi and interspersed with technical Vedantic terms that initiates sometimes find difficult to comprehend, moves intermittently from poetry to prose, and back. Poetic expressions, at times, are cryptic and generally require detailed explanation which, though provided by the author in prose, yet need to be elaborated upon by someone well versed in Vedantic terminology. However, it is admitted that in North India saints and sages often refer to *Vicharsagar* as an aid to *ātmañāna*, Self-knowledge.²⁶

Vicharsagar, which means ocean of discerning reflection, consists of seven *tarangas*, waves or sections. The first section identifies the *viśaya*, subject matter, the *adhikārin*, person qualified to study the text, the *prayojana*, purpose of the book, and the *sambandha*, relation between the subject matter and the purpose of the book. In the second section various doubts of disputants regarding the above aspects of the text and the Vedantist's response thereto are discussed. The attributes of a guru and a disciple as well as the nature of guru bhakti and its fruits have been mentioned in the third section. In the next three sections we find three students with symbolic names—Tattva-drishti, 'focused on the highest Truth', Adrishta, 'inexperienced', and Tarkadrishti, 'argumentative'—to whom the guru imparts instructions keeping in mind their intellectual levels. The states of the *jīvanmukta* and the *videhamukta*, liberated from the shackles of the physical frame, have been discussed in the seventh section. Another highlight of this last section is that while the guru imparts instructions to all the three students alike, the effect—in terms of the process of acquiring knowledge—produced on them is different (7.17–21).

Vicharsagar commences with eight invocatory couplets in keeping with the poetic tradition of India. Through these, the author gives an inkling into his intent, simultaneously wondering whom he should pay obeisance to (1–5) and what is the importance of the work (6–8). The first five couplets also provide the central idea of the book and the author's non-compromising attitude of *advaita-niṣṭhā*, adherence to non-dual principles:

Jo sukh nitya prakaś vibhu, nām rūp ādhār
Mari na lakhai jibi mati lakhai so maim śuddh
apār.
Abdhi apār svarūp mam laharī viṣṇu mahēś
Vidhi ravi chandā varun yam śakti ganēś dhaneś.
Jā kṛpālu sarvajñako hiya dhārat muni dhyān
Tāko hot upādhi taim mo maim mithyā bhān.
Hvai jihim jāne binu jagat manahu jevarī sām̐p
Naśai bhujag jag jihim lahai so'ham āpai āp.
Bodh cāhi jā ko sukrī bhajat rām niṣkām
So mero hai ātamā kā ko karūm prañām.

I am that undiluted Infinite Bliss that is eternal, self-effulgent, and all-pervading substratum of name and form; which the intellect conceives not but which conceives the intellect.

Of the nature of an infinite ocean am I and like its waves are Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Surya, Chandra, Varuna, Yama, Shakti, Kubera, and Ganesh.

The gracious omniscient Ishvara, conditioned by adjuncts, who becomes the object of meditation of sages is also reflected as an illusion in me.

Just as a rope appears as a snake when the knowledge of the former is absent, and the latter disappears with the knowledge of reality, similarly this world [of names and forms] disappears when the realization of 'I am He' dawns.

That Rama [without attributes], whom the pious sages worship without motive in order to attain enlightenment, is my Self. Whom then may I salute? (1.1–5).

It would not be incorrect to say that what follows in the book is an elaborate exposition of and a commentary on the above couplets, along with reference to technical details of the Shastras essential for firmly establishing the non-dualistic view of Brahman, maya, jiva, and jagat, the world.

Swami Rama Tirtha: Boundless Ocean of Harmony

I dance, I dance with glee
 In stars, in suns, in oceans free
 In moons and clouds, in winds I dance
 In will, emotions, mind I dance
 I sing, I sing, I am symphony

I am boundless ocean of Harmony.
The subject which perceives,
The object—thing perceived,
As waves in me they double
In me the world's a bubble.²⁷

While in 1893 Swami Vivekananda was proclaiming to the Western world, 'not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love ... not by the power of wealth, but by the power of the begging bowl'²⁸, there was this young man, Tirtha Ram—nearly ten years younger than the former and thousands of miles away in India—who having passed his MA in Mathematics from Punjab University, Lahore, had already started experiencing the stirrings of the Spirit. When in November 1897 Swamiji came to Lahore, Tirtha Ram was a professor in one of the colleges there, and it was under his guidance that some students had helped in arranging Swamiji's lectures. 'The relationship between the Swami and Tirtha Ram was most amicable, and the latter presented the Swami with a gold watch before he left. The Swami kindly accepted it, but put it back in Tirtha Ram's pocket saying, "Very well, friend, I shall wear it here, in this pocket."²⁹

Tirtha Ram recorded his impressions of Swamiji in a letter dated 16 November 1897:

Three lectures were delivered [by Swamiji] in English ... The subject of the first lecture was 'Principles Common to All Hindus.' ...

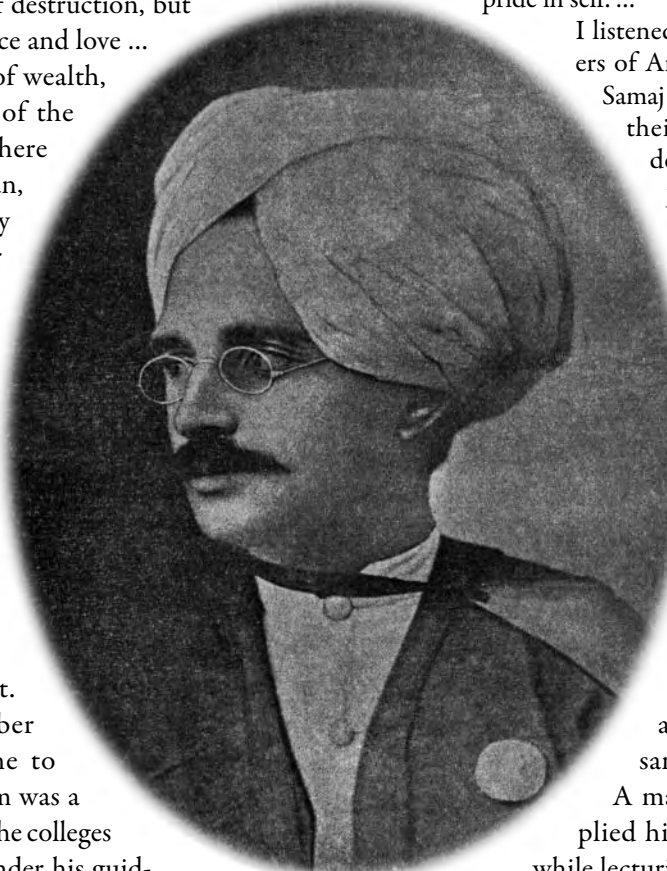
The second lecture was on 'Bhakti'. ... The third lecture was on 'Vedanta'. It lasted for full two and a half hours. The listeners were so deeply engrossed, and it created such an atmosphere, that all idea of time and space was lost. At times, one required absolute realization of oneness between oneself and the cosmic Atman. It struck at the roots of ego and pride in self. ...

I listened to his talks with leaders of Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj in private. He answered their questions in such a devastating manner, and presented before them such a picture of their principles, that they returned completely downfaced. And the beauty lies in the fact that he never uttered a single word which could offend their feelings' (2.293).

Not much time passed after this before Tirtha Ram retired to the forest and later became the sannyasin Rama Tirtha.

A mathematician who applied his skills in this subject while lecturing on Vedantic truths,

Rama Tirtha was, at the same time, a poet, a philosopher, a mystic, and a non-dualist. He was born in 1873 in the village Murariwala, in the Gujranwala district of West Punjab. His father was Goswami Hirananda, a brahmana whose meagre income came from his occasional visits to the North West Frontier Provinces, right up to Peshawar and Swat, where his disciples lived. Ram's mother died when he was only five years old. He was married at the age of ten. His father



Swami
Rama Tirtha

refused to support him and he had to pursue his higher studies with great difficulty through tuitions and stray scholarships. While doing this, he had also to provide for his wife's basic needs. Most of these years he spent in semi-starvation. In early years he was physically frail, but as he grew up he understood the importance of a sound health and took to exercises. Amidst all adversity, he remained cheerful, never losing his optimism. After completing his MA, he worked as a lecturer and professor in some colleges. Before taking sannyasa, he spent about a year in forests. His knowledge of Eastern and Western thought was phenomenal, and besides Vedic literature, especially the Upanishads and the Gita, he studied Hafiz, Maulana Rum, Maghrabi, Umar Khayyam, and other Sufi masters of Persia. Himself a poet who composed in Urdu, Persian, and English—and often quoted his own poems in his lectures—he was also fond of Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi poetry. In whatever language he would deliver a talk, his way of expression was sheer poetry. Such is his influence on a great many saints of North India that even today writers and speakers follow his style, quote his Urdu or Persian poems, and prefer to use Urdu instead of Sanskrit or Hindi to express themselves on the subject of Vedanta.

After becoming a sannyasin he spent about two years in the Himalayas, whose snow-capped peaks, gushing streams, and captivating beauty, attracted him immensely. In 1903 he left Calcutta for Japan, and after about a fortnight there travelled to San Francisco. He was in the US for nearly two years, spending most of his time in solitude. On his way back to India he visited Egypt, where he delivered a lecture in Persian in one of the biggest mosques of the country. He came to India in 1905 with two ideas from the West: (i) the need for organization in every department of life, and (ii) the need for united work. He emphasized on these two points in a series of lectures delivered in what was then called the United Provinces. In October 1906, on Dipavali day, he attained *mahāsamādhi* in the Ganga, in Tehri Garhwal.³⁰

In a lecture delivered on 17 December 1902 at the Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, he said: 'You know, in this country you say he gave up the ghost. In India we say he gave up the body. This shows the difference. Here the body is looked upon as the self and the ghost is looked upon as something tacked on. In India, the body is looked upon as something foreign to the spirit; the real Self is looked upon as the reality. There, when the body dies, nobody believes that he dies; the body changes, *he does not perish* (1.940).

Prof. Puran Singh, a close associate of Swami Rama Tirtha and himself a writer and a Vedantist, says:

With Swami Rama, the word Vedanta, which he so lovingly uses, is a comprehensive term. He does not restrict it by applying it to any particular system of philosophy or religion ... In order to understand and appreciate his teachings, we need not go into the labyrinthine mazes of metaphysical subtleties, for Swami Rama as he walks along with us in white, broad-day light on the path of life takes us by surprise and teaches us Vedanta in the aurora of the rising sun, in the blushes of the rose and in the dimples of the pearly dew (1.xxvi).

Echoing, as it were, Sri Ramakrishna's experience, Swami Rama Tirtha once wrote: 'God surrounds me like the physical atmosphere. He is closer to me than my breath. In him literally I live and move and have my being.' 'When consciousness passes into self-consciousness ... That is the highest knowledge. Why call it unknowable? This highest knowledge is one with peace, Ananda, Cit—Sacchidananda.'


Speaking about this world of phenomena in a lecture delivered at the Golden Gate Hall, San Francisco, Swami Rama Tirtha says: 'This phenomenon of the universe is nothing but names and forms, nothing but differentiations, variations, combinations. ... They are due to intrinsic illusion, the one Divinity manifests itself. God manifests Himself in these names and forms of the world which are called maya. ... Get beyond that and you are everything'

(3.46). 'The real meaning of this "why" is maya. *Ma* means "not" and *ya* means "that", and maya means "not that". ... It means something which we cannot call real and which we cannot call unreal and which we cannot call both real and unreal' (3.36).

What is God-realization or Self-realization? Swami Rama answers:

Your Godhead is not a thing to be accomplished. Realization is not a thing to be achieved. You have not to do anything to gain God-vision. You are simply to undo what you have already done in the way of forming dark cocoons of desires around you. So Self Realization is mainly a process of undoing and unlearning! Forgetting what you know yourself to be! Nothing more than that! This is the highest state and but for that not an unattainable one.³¹

And the perpetual poet in Swami Rama sings on:

The soundless sound, the flameless light.
The darkless dark and wingless flight
The mindless thought, the eyeless sight
The mouthless talk, the handless grasp so tight.
Am I, am I, am I.³² 

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Sri Madhvacharya's Vedic Insights

Prof. D Prahlada Char

TO THE HINDU MIND, the term 'Vedas' conjures up a beginningless and perhaps endless ancient, hoary literature usually considered the epitome of all wisdom regarding nature and God. It is, therefore, not surprising when gifted individuals in disciplines as diverse as ayurveda and astronomy trace their dedicated lifetime efforts to Vedic inspiration. In ancient times, while the priestly brahmana class was the custodian of Vedic learning, the other two main varnas of Hindu society—kshatriya and vaishya—were also eligible to study them. They even taught the brahmanas esoteric secrets of the Upanishads. Only the shudras, who were considered incompetent, could not directly learn the Vedas. However, given their significant numerical strength in society, they were also included in the mainstream by being provided with a less rigorous regimen for learning the Vedic philosophy and culture through the numerous Puranas and epics like the Mahabharata. In the Vedic social and cultural milieu that prevailed before the advent of Buddha, people almost wholly accepted this social outlook as fair and proper. Otherwise, it could not have lasted for millennia. The teaching systems were so designed and the Vedas were perpetuated in their original form for such long periods that their origins are inaccessibly buried in the opaque mists of the past. Most of the theories concerning the origin of the Vedas are unsubstantiated and have been subject to valid criticism. In present times very few people systematically learn the Vedas, which are being used mainly for rituals. This is a consequence of the development of different regional dialects.

Though having Sanskrit roots, these dialects have slowly but surely developed into new languages. Their knowledge does not give the necessary background to understand Vedic Sanskrit. This has resulted in a situation where there is only a miniscule percentage of people knowing Sanskrit well enough to be able to understand the Vedas. Even those who officiate in rituals and ceremonies often use the texts without understanding their meanings.

The Advent of Madhvacharya

In spite of well-structured attempts to preserve the Vedas and their necessary adjuncts, the *vedāṅgas*—which were indispensable in a paper-less and writing-less age—the mass of Vedas available today is considerably limited. Many old texts of different branches of the Vedas are missing, their names found only as quotes in ancient compositions and catalogues. Though it was believed that the Vedas had *eka-vākyatā*—complete harmonious meaning with no internal conflicts—some philosophical systems accepted only selected portions of the Vedas, using them mainly to support their own tenets. Thus, ideas such as the division of the Vedas into *karma-kāṇḍa*, ritual portion, and *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, knowledge portion; prominence of the Upanishads over the Brahmanas, with its *karma-kāṇḍa*; and division of the Vedas into *tattva-vedaka*, giving the factual position, and *atattva-vedaka*, stating an argumentative position for subsequent refutation, were introduced. This led to many schools of philosophy, each claiming allegiance to the Vedas. However, they strongly contradicted each other, leading to the common perception that the Vedas do not have *eka-vākyatā*. This gave the impression that they were just a collection of prayers to different deities, each of which was praised as the Supreme Power.

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Traditional scholars dwindled in number and became less prominent due to lack of social encouragement. New students, including scholars from other countries, attempted to understand the Vedas without the required rigorous training and background. All they had was the knowledge of Sanskrit. Consequently, they judged the Vedas without proper comprehension. They alleged that the Vedas were nothing but nature poetry and a product of the pastoral people of a primitive civilization.

The Mimamsakas have traditionally defended the Vedas against critics. Their approach virtually gave up the Upanishads, which contain philosophical speculation on the divinity inherent in this universe of variety, vastness, and complexity. They interpreted the Vedas as a process by which aspirants could perform prescribed acts like sacrifices and attain heaven, where they would get unbridled pure enjoyment. The division of the Vedas into Upanishads and *karma-kāṇḍa* by others further obscured the *eka-vākyatā* of the Vedas. It was against this background that Acharya Madhvacharya came as a rejuvenating breath of fresh air. He showed that all parts of the Vedas were relevant and important, and described and extolled the infinite auspicious qualities of the Supreme Being. To illustrate Madhvacharya's contribution in this regard, let us look at an incident from his life as described in his authentic biography, *Sumadhva Vijaya*, written by his scholar-disciple Narayana Pandita.

Once, while the young ascetic Madhvacharya was on a pilgrimage, in a village of Kerala, he met an assembly of scholars proficient in the Vedas. They had heard of his profound Vedic knowledge and were eager to hear his discourse. One of the scholars requested Madhvacharya to offer his interpretation on a hymn from the Aitareya recension. Madhvacharya recited the hymn perfectly; his recitation resembling the deep sound of the thundering clouds enthralled them. However, his interpretation, though offered with all supporting evidence, did not satisfy them. They insisted that it had a different meaning. Accepting their interpretation, Madhvacharya said: 'Yes, that is also one of the meanings.

Shrutis can have several meanings, with a minimum of three. The Mahabharata has at least ten meanings. And, each word of *Vishnu-sahasra-nama Stotra* has at least a hundred meanings.'

The scholars challenged him to explain the hundred meanings of the first word *viśva* in the *Vishnu-sahasra-nama*. They totally surrendered to him when they realized the profundity of his knowledge. They could barely keep up with his interpretations, which flowed like a river.¹

The above anecdote is mentioned here only to highlight the new path that Madhvacharya trod in explaining the Vedas. He was of the view that each and every hymn in the Vedas had at least three meanings: the deity such as Agni or Indra; the Supreme Being, Vishnu, who dwells in them; and the *adhyātma*, spiritual meaning. Madhvacharya has also shown this method of interpretation in his commentary on the Rig Veda, where he has given three meanings to the forty hymns of the first Mandala.

Do All Vedic Texts Point to Brahman?

The methodology of interpretation advocated by Madhvacharya was challenged. The main contention was the argument of Jaimini in the 'Mantra Adhikarana' of the *Mimamsa Sutra*, which states that mantras recited during a yajna not only produce merit but also convey meaning, mostly about a deity or a substance connected with the yajna. The knowledge of the deity or the substance related to the yajna, of course, may be obtained through other sources. But Jaimini insists that only when the yajna is performed with the awareness of the deity and the substance obtained through the mantras recited during its performance does it produce a special kind of merit which helps the performer achieve the intended result.

Further, words like 'Agni', 'Indra', and 'Varuna' that we come across in the Vedas have their own well-known meanings: the names of deities. Those words are not commonly known as the names of Vishnu. Even the context in which these words occur indicates that only the deities are referred to by these words. Again, if words like 'Agni' in the

Vedas are taken to mean both the deity and the Supreme Being, Parabrahman, then they will have to be accepted as having two or more meanings. In that case the Vedic sentences will lose *eka-vākyatā*, as a sentence whose meaning is changed must be considered a different sentence.²

Also, supposing all words such as 'Agni' and 'Indra' denote Vishnu, all the hymns of the Vedas will have to be considered hymns to Vishnu. According to the Vedic tradition, hymns are named after the deity whom the hymn intends to praise. If, as Madhvacharya says, all the Vedic words denote Vishnu and Vishnu alone, then all the hymns are to be named after Vishnu and the classification of the Vedic hymns as, for instance, 'Agni Sukta' or 'Indra Sukta' would be meaningless (xv–xix).

Madhvacharya's reply to these objections can be summarized as follows: It has been admitted by all who have made a thorough study of the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita that the word 'Om' signifies the Supreme Being—Parabrahman. This view is supported by the well-known Upanishadic statement '*Om-iti brahma*; Om is Brahman'³, and also Sri Krishna's statement in the Gita: '*Om-tat-sad-iti nirdeśo brahmaṇas-tri-vidhaḥ smṛtaḥ*; "*Om-tat-sat*"—this is considered to be the threefold designation of Brahman.'⁴ While the Upanishad states that Brahman is denoted by the word 'Om', the Gita says that each of the three expressions 'Om', *tat*, and *sat* denote Brahman. The view that the words 'Om' and 'Brahman' signify the same entity is also supported by the etymological analysis of these two words. The word 'Brahman' is derived from the root *brh*, meaning 'being unlimited'. This word conveys the nature of Parabrahman as '*ananta-guṇa-pari-pūrṇa*; full of countless virtues'. Similarly, the word 'Om' is derived from the root *av*, signifying 'being filled in' by infinite virtues. This word also conveys the same meaning of *ananta-guṇa-pari-pūrṇatva*. When *pravṛtti-nimitta*, the property on the basis of which two words are used, is the same, those words are considered synonyms. Thus, 'Om' and 'Brahman' are synonymous.

Having thus asserted that the terms 'Om' and 'Brahman' signify the same thing, Madhvacharya reminds us that the entire corpus of Vedic literature is a gloss on 'Om'. He quotes the *Chhandogya Upanishad* for support: '*Omkāreṇa sarvā vāk sanṛṇnāḥ*; all words are joined together by Om'.⁵ The entire body of the Vedas is based on the word 'Om'.⁶

Madhvacharya further argues that it is clear that the Vedas are an interpretation of the meaning of the word 'Om'. They are also commentaries on the word 'Brahman'. In short, the Vedas are intended to praise the glory of Brahman, which Madhvacharya identifies with Bhagavan Vishnu.

In his magnum opus *Anuvyakhyana*, which is a gloss on the *Brahma Sutra*, Madhvacharya establishes in a different manner this same thesis, that the whole of Vedic literature points to Vishnu: '*Śruternāmāni sarvāṇi viṣṇoreva*'.⁷ He explains that the Vedic tradition which holds the view that 'Om' consists of the three letters 'a', 'u', and 'm' also accepts that the words *bhuh*, *bhuvaḥ*, and *suvaḥ*, which are known as *vyāhṛtis*, actually explain the meaning of the three letters that make 'Om'. Again, the difficult meaning of the three *vyāhṛtis* is interpreted by the Gayatri Mantra which is *tripāda*, containing three quarters, each *pāda* interpreting one of the three *vyāhṛtis*. Further, the famous 'Purusha Sukta' of the Rig Veda, which consists of three *vargas*—a *varga* being a group of several *ṛks*—is held to be the interpretation of the three *pādas* of the Gayatri Mantra. Finally, the 'Purusha Sukta' is the epitome of the Vedas. Thus, the whole of the Vedic corpus, being a detailed interpretation of 'Om', conveys the same meaning that 'Om' signifies: Parabrahman (1.1.1).

Madhvacharya has yet another argument to establish that all the Vedas have Brahman as their purport. The aim of Shrutis is stated thus:

*Aduḥkhaṁ itarat sarvaṁ jīva eva tu duḥkhiṇaḥ;
Teṣāṁ duḥkha-prahāṇāya śrutireṣā pravartate.*

Only individual souls are subject to sorrow. Everything else, the non-sentient things and Brahman, do not have any sorrow. The main purpose of the scriptures is to free individual souls from sorrow.

According to Madhvacharya, suffering due to bondage is not false; it is very much real. It is only through the grace of Bhagavan, and by no other means, that one is released from the great misery that is this samsara: *Yasya prasādāt paramārti-rūpād asmāt saṁsārāt mucyate nāpareṇa*. Sri Krishna says in the Gita: '*Priyo hi jñānino'tyartham-aham sa ca mama priyaḥ*'; I am very much dear to the people of knowledge, and I love them intensely who know me.⁸ Here, Sri Krishna very clearly indicates that the grace of the Lord is obtained by knowing him. But, how to realize him is a big question. Our sense organs and mind have no capacity to reach him. Reasoning without the aid of direct experience is also quite indecisive, for any reasoned argument can be countered by another opposing argument. Finally, as decided by the *Brahma Sutra*: '*Śāstrayonitvāt*; (Brahman) can be known only through the Vedas.'⁹ Madhvacharya asserts that this establishes his thesis that the Vedas in their entirety do have their main purport in Bhagavan Vishnu: '*Mukhyārtho bhagavān-viṣṇuḥ sarva śāstrasya nāparaḥ*'.¹⁰

Conventions of the Ignorant and the Scholars

If all the Vedas intend to extol only the glory of Vishnu, it may be contended that various rituals, and also such other deities as Agni, Indra, and Varuna, should be kept outside the purview of the Vedas. Consequently, the hoary Vedic tradition which supports the practice of yajnas with a view to worshipping various deities will have to be totally rejected. But Madhvacharya clarifies that he is never averse to the interpretation of the Vedas as signifying rituals or deities. He fully supports the standard interpretation of the Vedas based on lexical catalogues like the Nigama and Nighantu. At the same time he also draws our attention to the mode of interpretation of the Vedas adopted by the *Brahma Sutra*, in which text a whole chapter is devoted to show that the various Vedic words and sentences signify Brahman. Terms like *ākāśa*, *prāṇa*, *jyoti*, and *avyakta*, which occur frequently in

the Vedas, are commonly understood as denoting things other than Brahman. But the *Brahma Sutra* points out that the characteristics of these terms delineated in the Vedas point to Brahman alone. The Vedas point to Brahman not by mere *rūḍhī*, conventional, usage. On the contrary, ordinary people understand the purport of the Vedas to be something other than Brahman. To them, *ākāśa* is just space, *prāṇa* is breath, and *jyoti* is light. Madhvacharya calls this convention as *ajñā-rūḍhī*, convention of the ignorant. Nevertheless, he maintains that Brahman is also the conventional purport of the Vedas, albeit the convention of scholars, *vidvad-rūḍhī*. He asserts that this is not his imagination. He quotes several Shrutis and Smritis in support of his stand: '*Yo devānām nāmadhā eka eva*; there is only one God who is the bearer of all names';¹¹ '*indram mitram varuṇam-agnim-āhur-atho divyaḥ sa suparṇo garutmān*'; they hail him as Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, or the divine golden-winged Garudā' (1.164.46).

An interpretation of the Vedas glorifying Brahman may be objected to as being against convention and hence unacceptable. Madhvacharya rejects this objection and maintains that it is *vidvad-rūḍhī* that must prevail over *ajñā-rūḍhī*. He gives an example to support his view: The Vedic injunction '*yavamayaḥ carurbhavati*' enjoins that *caru*, the substance to be offered in the sacrificial fire, should be prepared with *yava*, barley. What is *yava*? Mlecchas and Aryans use this word in different senses. Mlecchas use the word to mean *priyaṅgu*, which is a grain. Aryans use the same word to mean a different grain. So, the doubt arises as to which grain is to be used to prepare the *caru*. If the meaning adopted by the majority is to be accepted, then, since the Mlecchas are in larger number, *priyaṅgu* will have to be used to prepare the *caru*. However, Jaimini, the author of the *Mimamsa Sutra*, gave the ruling that the convention of the very learned Aryans is to be respected. Accordingly, the *caru* is to be prepared with the grain meant by the word *yava* by the Aryans. Similarly, Madhvacharya maintains that the convention of the *prajñas*, the learned—who



Sri Madhvacharya

use words like *ākāśa* mainly to mean Brahman—has to be respected.

Significantly, Madhvacharya asserts that the etymological meaning of *veda* is also Brahman. The words of the Vedas convey auspicious attributes of Brahman. For instance, the ordinary meaning of the word *indra* is the god Indra, also known as *devarāja*, king of the gods. However, this word has been derived from the root *ind*, which means *pāramaiśvarya*, being the supreme controller. Hence, the etymological meaning of the word is ‘one who controls’. As per this etymology, being the controller of the gods under him, Indra is Parameshvara. But this is merely an etymological meaning attributed to the name of the king of gods; his actual ability to control the gods externally or internally is very limited. He is not the *antaryāmin*, or indwelling controller, of those gods. Parabrahman alone is the *antaryāmin* in all. Therefore, by *mahāyoga*, great etymology, by which ‘unlimited controlling capacity’ is conveyed, it is Parabrahman that is primarily denoted by the word ‘Indra’ in the Vedic context.

Each Mantra Has Multiple Meanings

Madhvacharya proposed a triple interpretation of the Vedas: the traditional-historical, the mystical, and the transcendental-philosophical. All commentators on the Vedas, such as Sayana, are unanimous about the traditional interpretation. They all agree that the first mantra of the Rig Veda eulogizes the fire god, Agni: ‘*Agnimīle purohitam yajñasya devam-ṛtvijam hotāraṁ ratnadhātāmam*; I adore Fire, the sacrificial priest, divine ministrant, who presents oblations, [and is] the bestower of riches.’ Even when there is a difference in this type of interpretation, it is not of much significance. Without disputing this interpretation, Madhvacharya goes a step further. The same mantra intends to praise Sri Hari, who, being the inner controller of the god Agni, dwells in him and is also called by the name ‘Agni’. Finally, Madhvacharya offers a philosophical interpretation of the same mantra: that it is in praise of Lord Vishnu who is *adhyātma*—residing in our bodies along with our selves.¹²

According to the commentary of Madhvacharya, the seer of this mantra is eulogizing the fire god Agni and the supreme deity Vishnu, also known as Agni. Vishnu is the indwelling controller of Agni. The important point here is that though the epithets used to praise Agni and Vishnu are the same, the auspicious attributes conveyed by them are unlimited and uncontrolled in Vishnu, while the same are very much limited and controlled by Vishnu, the *antaryāmin*, in Agni.

According to Madhvacharya’s commentary, the first word of the first mantra of the Rig Veda has the following meanings:¹³

i) In any sacrifice there are many deities to be worshipped. But, Agni, and Vishnu indwelling in him, are called ‘Agni’ because they are the first to be worshipped: *agre eva abhipujyavāt agnih*.

ii) They are called ‘Agni’ for yet another reason. The word *agni* also means ‘superior’: *agre bhava, uttama*. Being the Supreme Being, Bhagavan Vishnu has superiority par excellence. Hence, he is Agni. The fire god, Agni, also has superiority, but in a limited sense. He is superior only to those

whom he controls.

iii) The word *agni* also signifies another characteristic of Bhagavan Vishnu: *agrya netṛtva* or *prathama pravartakatva*. It was Bhagavan Vishnu who created the world consisting of the sentient and the insentient, and activated them. Thus, he is the first activator—*prathama pravartaka*. The fire god Agni too causes activity in the sentient and the non-sentient under the direction of the Supreme Being. Hence, he is also called 'Agni'.

iv) *Atṛtva*, the property of 'partaking of' or 'being the destroyer' is another meaning conveyed by the term *agni*. Bhagavan Vishnu not only creates and sustains the world, he also destroys it when *mahā-pralaya*, apocalypse, approaches. Being the destroyer of the world, he is Agni. The *atṛtva* conveyed by the word *agni* also has a different shade of meaning. In the yajnas it is mainly fire that partakes of the ghee offered in the sacrificial fire. Fire god Agni, through whom ghee is offered, is also *attā*, partaker of the ghee. Therefore, he can also be called 'Agni'.

v) Bhagavan Vishnu is called 'Agni' because he is *aṅga-netā* and *śarīra-pravartaka*, the activator of all bodies. Through his presence in the bodies, Agni also activates them. Hence, he too is known as 'Agni'.

vi) *Agni* also means '*aga-netā*'. *Aga* is that which cannot move on its own. Here movement is not mere motion, but any activity. The whole world consisting of sentient and non-sentient entities, being totally dependent on Brahman, cannot have any activity of its own. Thus, the whole world is *aga*. It is Sri Hari, present in all entities, who makes them act. Thus, he is *aga-netā*, and in this sense also he is called Agni.

According to Madhvacharya, the other words in the mantra—such as *purohitam*, *devam*, *yajñasya ṛtvijam*, *hotāram*, and *ratnadhātāmam*—also praise the glory of Sri Hari in the main.

Sri Hari is *purohita*, as he is *hita*, conducive to the world, from time immemorial. The root *div*, from which the word *deva* is derived, has many meanings. Thus Sri Hari is *deva* for various reasons.

Effulgence, victory, shine, praiseworthiness, knowledge, and bliss are a few meanings of this word. Each one of these virtues is infinite in Vishnu. Agni also has all these attributes, but in a limited manner.


Priests called *ṛtviks* play an important role in all Vedic sacrifices. It is their responsibility to invite the gods, to recite the mantras to perfection, to sing the Sama hymns to please the gods, and to supervise the performance of the ritual meticulously, abiding by all the injunctions laid down in the Shrutis and Smritis. The priests can perform these activities only because of the presence of Sri Hari in them, and due to his motivation. This, according to Madhvacharya, is conveyed when the mantra praises Sri Hari as *yajñasya ṛtvijam*. Among the many priests engaged in a yajna—such as the *hotā*, *adhvaryu*, *udgātā*, and *brahmā*—the *hotā* occupies a special place. Though Sri Hari is present in all the *ṛtviks*, it is in the *hotā* that he is present in his Agni form. This specific form of his is especially praised in the 'Agni Sukta'. Madhvacharya says that it is for this reason that though Sri Hari is present in all the *ṛtviks*, including the *hotā*, and is praised by the words *yajñasya ṛtvijam*, the mantra praises again the specific form of Sri Hari through the word *hotāram*. Finally, the seer of the mantra, who is naturally a seeker of pure bliss, praises Sri Hari and also Agni as *ratna-dhātama*, abode of bliss par excellence. According to Madhvacharya, the word *ratna*, though generally meaning 'precious stone', also means bliss, as it can be derived from the root *ram*, signifying 'bliss'. Thus, 'with each word conveying an auspicious character, I, the seer of the mantra, praise Agni—especially the form of Sri Hari present in Agni'.

Treading New Ground: the Ādhyātmika Interpretation

Apart from the above two interpretations, Madhvacharya offers another interpretation which he calls *ādhyātmika*, the spiritual interpretation. He also insists that each and every Vedic hymn can be interpreted in this manner.

The *ādhyātmika* interpretation of the 'Agni Sukta' by Madhvacharya is indeed unique. He says that yajnas are of two kinds: external and internal. The two interpretations already given are related to external yajnas. The spiritual interpretation of the same mantra is with regard to the internal yajna, which is essentially a *jñāna-yajña*, sacrifice in the form of knowledge. Knowledge is obtained through the body and senses. In this mantra the seer praises Sri Hari who dwells in all bodies. He calls Sri Hari Agni for it is due to him that the body functions: *angam śarīram nayati prerayati*. In this *jñāna-yajña*, the *yajamāna*, performer of the rite, is the soul who is striving hard for liberation. The *ṛtviks* are the presiding deities of the sense organs. Being the controller of those deities, Sri Hari also is called *ṛtvik*. In a way, the sense organs are Agni, the sacrificial fire. The objects which are experienced by the sense organs are *havis*, oblation. It is Sri Hari who makes the sense organs reach objects and experience them. Thus, Sri Hari is the *hotā*—he pours oblations in the sacrificial fire. It is he who causes the experience of objects in the jiva. Thus, sense experience and knowledge are forms of *jñāna-yajña*. The jiva who earnestly seeks the knowledge of Brahman apart from sense experiences praises Sri Hari as the presiding deity of this *jñāna-yajña*.

The above description of Madhvacharya's spiritual interpretation of the first mantra of the Rig Veda gives an idea of his unique approach to Vedic literature. This interpretation is significant in its inclusiveness of earlier commentators of the Vedas such as Yaska, as well as later commentators like Sayana. However, in many places he differs from them even in the general interpretation of the Vedic hymns. His spiritual interpretation cannot be set aside as imaginary and baseless. Jayatirtha, the great commentator on many of Madhvacharya's works, and also several later commentators have shown in detail the grammatical and philological aptness of Madhvacharya's interpretation. Madhvacharya's approach satisfies the spiritual hunger of seekers of hidden Vedic treasures.

We have already mentioned the significance of a holistic view of the Vedas without any bias for any specific part. Madhvacharya's methodology gloriously achieves this objective without sacrificing the limited views taken by other commentators regarding the yajnas or the Upanishads. It also helps us in our quest to reach out to the causal Primal Being beyond all pleasures and thus conquer all sorrow. This Primal Being creates, maintains, and eventually destroys this universe. The true objective of assuming a human body and mind, whose mysteries science barely understands, are known from the commentaries of Madhvacharya. One wishes that the path blazed by Madhvacharya be followed to its logical conclusions, and the entire Vedic corpus be studied and understood according to the principles he suggested. 

Notes and References

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2. Madhvacharya, *Rgveda Bhāṣya*, ed. Prof. K T Pandurangi (Bangalore: Dvaita Vedanta Studies and Research Foundation, 1999), 1.xiv.
3. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 1.8.1.
4. *Bhagavadgita*, 17.23.
5. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 2.23.3.
6. *Rgveda Bhāṣya*, xii–xiii.
7. Madhvacharya, *Anuvyākhyāna* (Bangalore: Vidya-mandira, Dvaita Vedanta Pathashala), 1.1.2.
8. *Gita*, 7.17.
9. *Brahma Sutra*, 1.1.3.
10. *Anuvyākhyāna*, 1.1.4.
11. *Rig Veda*, 10.82.3.
12. The following is Madhvacharya's commentary that gives all the three interpretations for the first mantra of the Rig Veda: '*Agni-śabdo'yam-agra evābhīpūjyātām. Agryatvam-agra-netṛtvam-attim-aṅgāganetṛtām. Āha taṁ staumya-aśeṣasya pūrvameva hitam prabhum. Ṛtvīn-niyāmakatvena yajñānām-ṛtvijaṁ sadā. Dyotanād-vijayāt-kāntyā stutyā vyavahṛter-api. Gatyā ratyā-ca devākhyam hotṛ-saṁsthaṁ viśeṣataḥ. Agni-saṁsthena rūpeṇa yato'gnir-hotṛ-devatā. Indriyāgniṣu cārthānām yaddhotā hotṛ-nāmakah. Rati-dhārakottamatvāt-sa ratnadhātama iritaḥ*'; *Rgveda Bhāṣya*, 41.
13. See *ibid.*, xx.

Vishishtadvaita: A Perspective

Prof. V K S N Raghavan

ALL SYSTEMS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY, with the exception of Buddhism, Jainism, and Charvaka, have developed around the Vedas. While the exceptions denounced their validity, the rest set out with the sole aim of interpreting the Vedas. Those that upheld their validity, firmly believed that this body of literature held the key to solving the problem of the cycle of birth and death. As is evident from the history of Indian philosophy, during the course of their development, each of these systems came to focus on a specific area. Thus, the preferred area of specialization of Sankhya was cosmology, that of Nyaya was logical analysis, Vaisheshika evolved categories; the Mimamsa dwelt on Vedic exegesis, and the Yoga system evolved techniques of meditation. But the credit for reaching a holistic interpretation goes to the system of Vedanta, albeit through its absorption of some of the doctrines of other systems which came to its aid while explaining areas like logic, cosmology, and the like. While the study of the other systems have remained more an intellectual exercise, the impact that the Vedantic thought has had on the minds and lives of Indian as well as non-Indian people speaks volumes for its merit.

The term Vedanta refers to a group of schools of thought like the Advaita, the Vishishtadvaita, the Dvaita, and some other schools as well. They are called Vedanta as their edifice rests mainly on the Upanishads—which form the *anta*, end portion, of the Vedas—besides the Bhagavadgita and the *Brahma Sutra*. In spite of sharing a common source of literature and a common goal of moksha,

these schools have evolved into distinct systems of thought. This is mainly because of the variegated nature of their common source. The Upanishads, for example, abound in various kinds of statements which are classified as *bheda-śruti*, statements that advocate difference between the ultimate Reality and the world and humans, *abheda-śruti*, which proclaim oneness of the two, and the *ghāṭaka-śruti*, which strive to link these two types of statements. As a result, there arose serious differences among the philosophical schools regarding the interpretation of basic texts and their world view, and other major issues like the nature of the ultimate Reality or God and the relationship that exists between God, on the one hand, and humans and the world, on the other.

The Advaita system takes greater cognizance of the *abheda-śruti* and advocates phenomenal or even illusory construction of the world. Like the Madhyamika or Yogachara Buddhists prior to them, the Advaitins also deny the reality of the external world. For them the ultimate Reality, Brahman, alone is real, and they further assert the oneness of the individual self and Brahman, the universal Self. The Advaitic thought is thus often compared to that of the latter-day idealist. The Dvaita school, for its part, has laid greater stress on the *bheda-śruti*.

The Vishishtadvaita has evolved more as a reaction to the views of the Advaitins. For the Vishishtadvaitins both the *bheda-* and the *abheda-śruti* are equally important and are to be understood and interpreted in the light of the *ghāṭaka-śruti*, which provides the link between the two. For them, the world is as real as the individual self. The ultimate Reality is one, while matter and jivas form its attributes. They also identify the ultimate Reality with a personal god, Narayana. This

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position being thoroughly opposed to that of the Advaitins, it can be said to represent the 'realistic' school of thought.

Creation and the Tattvas

The philosophical enquiry of Vishishtadvaita Vedānta centres around the understanding of three major topics: (i) *tattva*, reality; (ii) *hita*, means of realization; and (iii) *puruṣārtha*, goal to be pursued. A good understanding of the nature of *tattvas* is the first and most essential stepping stone to the knowledge of Reality. The *tattvas* are classified into *para-tattva* and *avara-tattva*. The former relates to the ultimate Reality, Brahman—also referred to as Ishvara—while the latter relates to two categories: *cit*, jivas, who are the sentient beings, and *acit*, insentient objects, which comprise the material world. The three together—Brahman, *cit*, and *acit*—are known as *tattva-traya*, the three *tattvas*. While Brahman is the *svatantra*, independent, and superior *tattva*, the other two are *paratantra*, dependent, on Brahman. This classification is based on the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, which states that the *tattvas* are classified into *bhoktā*, the jiva who experiences the world, *bhogyā*, the world with its myriad objects of experience, and *preritā*, the controller of the world and the jivas.

It may be asked as to how this system calls itself non-dualistic when it subscribes to three *tattvas*. The Vishishtadvaita system believes in the non-duality of Brahman and considers that this Brahman is *viśiṣṭa*, characterized, by the jivas and the world, which are its *viśeṣyas*, attributes, forming its *śarīra*, body. Brahman is the creator and sustainer of all the rest and the spirit dwelling within each one of these entities as well. The non-dual oneness of the ultimate Reality is thus an organic oneness, *viśiṣṭasya-advaitam*. As an integral whole, Brahman includes in it all related entities consisting of the jivas and the world, which are totally under its control and dependent on it. Further, for the Vishishtadvaitin, Brahman is none other than Nara-yana, the consort of Sri. Attaining him through the means of bhakti and *prapatti*, surrender, is the

goal the jiva should pursue in its embodied state; the culmination of this effort is liberation from the cycle of birth and death and, further still, service to the Lord at his transcendental abode.

The *acit-tattva*, which is one of the two *viśeṣyas* that characterize Brahman, is insentient. There are three kinds of *acit*: (i) *prakṛti*, matter; (ii) *kāla*, time; and (iii) *śuddha-sattva*, pure *sattva*, transcendental spiritual matter. Of these, *prakṛti* is a substance which consists of the three *guṇas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—and is subject to modification. This *prakṛti* is also called *mūla-prakṛti*, the prime source, as it is the stuff from which evolves the cosmos, the abode of the jiva in its embodied state. In its unmanifest state it is known as *avyakta*.

From *prakṛti* emerges *mahat tattva*, the universal mind, in the initial state of creation, along with the three *guṇas*. *Mahat* evolves into *ahamkāra tattva*, the principle of ego, which in turn assumes three forms—on the basis of the three *guṇas*—called *sāttvika-ahamkāra*, *rājasa-ahamkāra*, and *tāmasa-ahamkāra*. The *sāttvika-ahamkāra*, aided by the *rājasa-ahamkāra*, gives rise to the eleven organs: the five sense organs, the five organs of action, and the mind, in which the *sattva* element is predominant. The *tāmasa-ahamkāra* evolves into the five *tanmātras*, subtle elements, characterized by sound, touch, colour, taste, and odour. From these subtle *tanmātras* emerge the five gross elements consisting of ether, air, fire, water, and earth. The total number of evolutes, including *prakṛti*, is considered to be twenty-four.

The creation of the universe till the formation of the five *tanmātras* is termed *samaṣṭi-sṛṣṭi*, collective creation. From here on the formation of the physical universe from the five gross elements is said to take place on the basis of a process of quintuplication of the elements, known as the *pañcīkaraṇa-prakriyā*. The process is explained thus: one half of each subtle element is mixed with one eighth each of the other four to give rise to various gross elements. This explanation has been endorsed by the *Chhandogya Upanishad* as also by the Puranas. The entire process of evolution is only a change of state.

Creation is a transformation from the state of cause to that of effect, which implies that every effect has a pre-existing cause. Clay gets transformed into a pot, its lid, and so on. Golden ornaments are but a transformed state of the metal. But the basic substances of clay or gold continue to exist even in the state of the *kārya*, effect. Cause and effect are thus only two different states of the same substance. The cause is that which invariably precedes the effect, *avyavahita-pūrvakālāvasthā*. When the product gets destroyed, it goes back to its original state.

The above brief account of evolution does not imply that Creation is an accidental or natural process of evolution. The Upanishads often speak of the will of Brahman as the primary cause of the universe. Any creation needs a collocation of causes. Indian tradition speaks of *upādāna-kāraṇa*, the material cause, *nimitta-kāraṇa*, the instrumental cause, and *sahakāri-kāraṇa*, other accessories, as jointly responsible for any creation. The Upanishads also speak of Brahman as the material cause of the universe through the analogy of a lump of clay being the material cause of a pot. This would amount to accepting modification in the material cause, in Brahman itself. But the Upanishads also promulgate *nirvikāratva*, immutability, of Brahman and, hence, Brahman cannot be considered the material cause. Nor can *prakṛti* by itself be an independent *kāraṇa*, since it is insentient.

The Vishishtadvaitins explain that Brahman, the *upādāna-kāraṇa* of the universe, is *cid-acid-viśiṣṭa*—organically related to the *cit*, jivas, and *acit*, matter, in its subtle form. Brahman is always qualified by *cit-acit* in both its states of creation and dissolution. In the state of dissolution *cit-acit* exist in Brahman in subtle form, and in the created state they exist in gross form. In the former state they lie in an unmanifest form, without any name or form, merged in Brahman. During Creation, *cit* and *acit* are manifested through name and form. This, according to the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, happens after Brahman, who is in the subtle state before Creation, wills to become many. He is thus also the *nimitta-kāraṇa*, efficient cause.

In the created state it is not Brahman that undergoes modification, but *cit-acit* that transforms. More precisely, *acit* transforms from one state to another, as in the clay turning into a pot. *Cit* too does not get transformed; only its knowledge, which was dormant in the state of dissolution, expands to the extent that karma permits. In Brahman per se there can be no modification. Brahman alone is now the controller of the gross *cit* and *acit*, instead of the subtle *cit-acit*, as was the case prior to Creation. Any change in *cit* or *acit*, which are the attributes of Brahman, cannot substantively affect Brahman, to whom they belong.

There is yet another reason why Creation cannot bring about any change in Brahman. The ‘Antaryami Brahmana’ of the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* tells us that *cit* and *acit* constitute the body of Brahman. Body and soul are organically related to each other and are inseparable. Brahman as the *śarīrin*, soul, is always related to *cit* and *acit*. The changes that take place in a body do not affect the nature of the immanent soul. In actual life too we find that physical transformations affect only the body but not the soul. Just as the soul supports the body, Brahman is the support of *cit* and *acit*. He not only creates and supports, he also enters into every one of them and bestows them with name and form. Thus, every thing that exists owes its creation and sustenance to Brahman and eventually also merges into it at the time of dissolution.

Kāla is another insentient *tattva* admitted by Vishishtadvaitins. It is considered a real entity that enjoys the same status as *prakṛti*. It is also considered infinite, though conditioned and divisible into units of time like second, minute, hour, and the like due to the conditioned way—as existing in a particular period of time—in which objects are perceived.

Suddhasattva is yet another insentient *tattva* admitted by the Vishishtadvaitins. It is devoid of *tamas* and *rajas* and is considered to be beyond the sphere of *prakṛti*. The ‘Purusha Sukta’ speaks of this abode as divine and eternal and incomprehensible to ordinary mortals. It is the abode of the

nitya-sūris, eternal beings, and the *muktas*, liberated ones, who eternally enjoy the blissful vision of the effulgent Brahman.

The jiva, *cit*, is a sentient *tattva* and is also known as Atman. It is distinct from the other sentient *tattva*, Brahman, who is the Paramatman. The Upanishads speak of the differences between jiva and Brahman. The *Mundaka Upanishad* explains how the jiva is subject to bondage and experiences the fruits of karma in the form of pleasure and pain, while Brahman is merely the witness of the jiva and its experiences. The Upanishads also speak of the jiva being ignorant, while Brahman is omniscient. The jiva is the ruled, while Brahman is the ruler. The jiva is *anu*, monadic, and *paratantra*, dependent, while Brahman is *vibhu*, infinite, and *svatantra*, independent. Vishishtadvaita holds that jivas are infinite in number and different from one another, and distinct from Brahman. Every jiva is *nitya*, eternal, and is neither born nor dies; rather it passes through the cycle of birth and death due to its karma, which has been accruing from time immemorial. When the jiva becomes associated with a body, it is said to be born and when it is dissociated from one, it is said to be dead.

The jiva is *jñāna-svarūpa*, of the nature of knowledge, which accounts for its being spiritual. Besides, it is also endowed with knowledge as an attribute. Vishishtadvaita considers the jiva as *svarūpa-jñāna* or *dharmi-jñāna* and refers to its attributive knowledge as *dharmabhūta-jñāna*. The jiva, being immutable, cannot undergo any modification in the form of knowing, feeling, or willing, nor can it be an agent of any action. These are made possible only by the *dharmabhūta-jñāna* as it is an attribute of the jiva, which is the substrate. Any modification that the attribute undergoes does not affect the substrate, just as physical changes in a human being's body do not affect the self within. While the self reveals itself, the *dharmabhūta-jñāna* reveals objects, and thus they have different areas of operation. The Vishishtadvaitin compares the *dharmi-jñāna* to the flame of a candle, and *dharmabhūta-jñāna* to its luminosity. There is another distinction between

them; the jiva or *dharmi-jñāna* comprehends what is revealed to it by the *dharmabhūta-jñāna*, but the latter can only reveal without knowing what it reveals. Like luminosity, the *dharmabhūta-jñāna* is both an attribute as well as a substance. Yet it is not an independent substance, though—so far as it undergoes modifications like desire, pain, pleasure, and the like—it is a substance. Incidentally, Vishishtadvaitins accept perception, inference, and verbal testimony as *pramāṇas*, valid means of knowledge.

The *dharmabhūta-jñāna* is present in every being, which implies that the knowledge of one jiva is different from that of another. Though it is capable of knowing all, *sarva-gocara-svabhāva*, its operation is restricted in the embodied state, depending on the merits and demerits of the individual self. In the case of Brahman and the liberated souls, it is fully operational. Thus, for the *dharmabhūta-jñāna* to attain its full potential, the jiva has to attain liberation. The jivas are of different types: eternally free, liberated, and bound. The bound jiva has to attain *viveka*, discriminatory knowledge regarding the *tattvas*, develop *vairāgya*, detachment, and strive for liberation. It may choose bhakti yoga or *prapatti*, total surrender to Narayana, in order to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death and attain Brahman.

Brahman or Paramatman is the ultimate *tattva*. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* defines the nature of Brahman as qualified by truth, knowledge, and infinitude. He is the *sarveśvara*, Supreme Being, *jagat-kāraṇa*, the causal substance of the universe, the one immanent in all, *heya-pratyanika*, devoid of any imperfection, *kalyāṇa-guṇaika-tāna*, the abode of all that is auspicious, *sarvakarma-samārādhyā*, the one propitiated by all rituals, *sarva-phala-prada*, the one who bestows the fruits of all actions, *svatantra*, independent, and the Lord of Lakshmi. This Brahman is the substrate of the universe and also its controller.

Being the controller of all entities in the universe, Brahman is considered the inner Soul, the universal Self, Paramatman. Just as the physical body of a being is associated with its *jīvātman*, Paramatman

has the entire universe consisting of the sentient *cit* as well as the insentient *acit* as its body.

The relationship that exists between Paramatman, on the one hand, and the universe consisting of matter and individual souls, on the other, is technically known as *śarīra-śarīri-bhāva*, a body-soul relationship, which is one of the principle doctrines of the Vishishtadvaita system. Paramatman is the soul, the substratum, the controller, and the master. The jivas and *prakṛti* are the body of Brahman; they are the supported, the controlled, and the subservient, *śeṣa*. Just as the body and soul co-exist, Brahman and the universe also coexist. The relationship is an inseparable one, *apṛthaksiddha*, as in the case of substance and attribute. The ultimate Reality of Vishishtadvaita metaphysics is thus an organic one, qualified by the attributes of *cit* and *acit*. Brahman, according to this system, is none other than the personal God, Narayana. They draw support for their stand from the 'Purusha Sukta', the *Mahānarayana Upaniṣad*, and allied texts.

Puruṣārtha and Hita

Having examined the three *tattvas*, the next topic to be understood is the ways and means of achieving the goal of moksha. Vishishtadvaita holds that all jivas are eligible for moksha. But one who is desirous of attaining it must strive for it by practising sadhana, which will result in the Lord's grace needed to achieve the goal.

According to Vishishtadvaita, bhakti yoga and *prapatti* yoga are the two direct paths to this supreme goal of moksha. While Vedantic texts lay greater stress on bhakti as the way of sadhana, Vaiṣṇava literature, like the Agamas and the *Divya-prabandha* of the Alvars, accord greater importance to *prapatti*.

Bhakti is defined as *mahānīya-viśaye prīti*, intense love for the Supreme Being. As a means for moksha, it is a rigorous spiritual discipline which demands constant loving meditation, *snehapūrvam anudhyānam*. It is a complex process involving *upāsana*, worship of Brahman on the lines of the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* prescribed in the yoga system. But

practice of bhakti yoga presupposes knowledge of the self as arising from the proper practice of karma yoga and jnana yoga, as laid down in the Gita. Performing *nitya* and *naimittika* karmas without any attachment to their fruits keeps the mind at peace and prepares the aspirant to realize the self, either directly or through jnana yoga which, under normal circumstances, is the next step in the ladder.

While the Advaitin holds that jnana yoga is the main sadhana for *brahma-sākṣātkāra*, realization of Brahman, for the Vishishtadvaitin both karma yoga and jnana yoga are merely aids to *ātma-sākṣātkāra*, realization of the self, and *brahma-sākṣātkāra* takes place only through bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga comprises meditation, worship, and seeking refuge in Paramatman. When bhakti reaches a certain mature state, it provides a near equivalent, *darśana-samākāra*, of the vision of Paramatman and the aspirant develops *para-bhakti*. When this *para-bhakti* creates an intense desire for the direct vision of God, he grants a glimpse of himself, and the aspirant reaches the state known as *para-jñāna*. Then follows an ardent desire for the constant vision of God, which is *parama-bhakti*. When this stage is reached, bhakti culminates in moksha and the aspirant enjoys the bliss of *paripūrṇa-brahmānubhava*, full realization of Brahman.

The path of bhakti yoga presents innumerable difficulties, and even very competent aspirants find it very arduous. Nor is every jiva eligible to practise it. The Gita, the Agamas, and the *Divya-prabandha* of the Alvars have shown an alternate path to moksha. This is the path of self-surrender—also called *śaraṇāgati*, *prapatti*, *nyāsa*, and *ātma-nikṣepa*. *Prapatti* does not require the practice of any of the rigorous yogas. It is open to all irrespective of caste, creed, or gender. An aspirant has to just surrender oneself unto the Supreme Being once, in all humility, accepting two things: (i) that there is no other alternative for him than this self-surrender, *ananya-gatitva*; and (ii) that he is not capable of taking to any other means to attain moksha, *sādhana ākiñcanya*.

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Lingayat Philosophy and Vedanta

Prof. N G Mahadevappa

OF MORE THAN TWENTY THOUSAND Kannada Vachanas—sayings of Virashaiva saints—extant now, nearly fifteen thousand were written in the twelfth century by Basavanna, the founder of Lingayatism or Virashaivism,¹ and his followers. They are the authentic source material for study of the metaphysics, ethics, religion, and social philosophy of Virashaivism. Sanskrit works like *Siddhanta-shikhamani* of Shivayogi Shivacharya, *Shivanubhava-sutra* of Maggeya Mayideva, *Shivadvaita-manjari* of Svaprabhananda, and *Srikara-bhashya* of Sripati Pandita are also said to enshrine the Lingayat doctrines. But some of them are post-Basavanna works and some others not genuine. Therefore, what follows is based on the Kannada Vachanas.

Shaktivishishtadvaita, the name for Virashaiva metaphysics, suggests that it is a school of Vedanta, like Advaita and Vishishtadvaita. But a close examination proves the contrary. Normally, the word 'Vedanta' refers either to the philosophy of the Upanishads or to that system of philosophy which is enshrined in the commentaries on 'the triple foundation', *prasthāna-traya*—the principal Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, and Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra*. The Vedantacharyas, commentators on the triple foundation, like Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, and others draw support from these three foundational sources in order to prove their Advaitic or Vishishtadvaitic theses. However, no Virashaiva or Lingayat has written a commentary on these three—not even the *Brahma Sutra*, from the Virashaiva standpoint. This definition,

therefore, excludes Lingayatism from the group of Vedanta schools. Some scholars claim that one Sripati Pandita of the eleventh century has written the *Srikara-bhashya*, a commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* from the Virashaiva point of view. But others contend that this work is not genuine on the following three grounds: (i) It contains references to Madhvacharya, who lived in the thirteenth century, both by name and by doctrine. It appears to have been authored by some scholars in 1891 and ascribed to Sripati Pandita, who actually lived in the eleventh century, with the sole intention of pushing the date of Virashaivism to a pre-Basava period. (ii) The book abounds in plagiarism, for commentaries of more than one hundred and thirty sutras have been copied fully or partially from the *Sribhashya* of Ramanujacharya. (iii) Moreover, the doctrines advocated in this work are diametrically opposed to those advocated by Lingayatism as enshrined in the Kannada Vachanas. For example, it upholds the doctrine—contained in the 'Apashudra' (Pseudo-shudra) section²—that the shudras, untouchables, and women in general are not eligible for moksha, because they are not authorized to study the Vedas as they do not wear the sacred thread,³ whereas the Lingayats have been advocating that all those who wear the *iṣṭalinga*—the linga that all Lingayats wear on their person—are equally eligible for moksha, whether they are men or women, shudras or brahmanas.

Although the Virashaiva metaphysics can be constructed purely on the basis of the Vachanas, it can still be called Shaktivishishtadvaita Vedanta, because its doctrines of God, soul, world, and liberation are comparable to those of the Vedanta schools and some of them are based on the Upanishads.

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Concept of God

Just because the Virashaivas call their God Shiva, it does not follow that the Shiva conceived by them is the same as that conceived by the Shaiva Siddhantins. The Shaiva Siddhantin concept of Shiva conforms to the Agamas. The Shiva of the Agamas and the Puranas is masculine, living in Kailas with his wife Parvati, sons Ganapati and Kumara, and a host of liberated persons and attendants like Bhiringi and Nandi. He wears a garland of human skulls, has a snake round his neck, and the moon on his head. According to the Puranas, Shiva is one of the Trinity—the other two being Brahma and Vishnu—and his duty is to destroy the universe, while the duties of creation and maintenance of the world are assigned, respectively, to the other two deities. He grants wishes to his devotees rather indulgently, without worrying about possible evil consequences.

The Virashaivas regard Kailas as a mere desert mountain. Shiva's residence there makes him a purely transcendent being, which is not acceptable to them. For the Virashaivas, Shiva is both transcendent and immanent. Moreover, they divest Para-shiva of all anthropomorphic qualities. For them, he is not masculine, nor does he have a family. Chaudayya the ferryman, for example, says that 'no garland of skulls is worn (by Shiva), nor does he hold trident or tabor'.⁴ The Lingayats advocate belief in and worship of only one God, Shiva, and do not accept the supremacy of Brahma or Vishnu. He is the Supreme Lord of the universe. They worship him in the form of *iṣṭalinga*, placing it on their left palm, and also abstain from visiting temples for that purpose.

Many a time the Vachanakaras describe Shiva as *nirguṇa*, featureless, *nirākāra*, formless, and *nirālamba*, unsupported. These epithets apply to Para-shiva of the pre-creation state. But they do not entitle us to identify him with the featureless and formless Brahman of Advaita, because even in that stage he is associated with shakti, which is unmanifest then and which becomes the universe later. He really creates the universe, maintains and destroys it cyclically, and therefore, these functions

and qualities of Shiva, according to Virashaivism, are not maya, as they are in Advaita.

The Virashaivas also call Shiva by various names: Linga, Paravastu, Parabrahman, Chit, Chaitanya, Satchidananda, Bayalu or Shunya or Akasha (Space), Chid-bayalu or Chidakasha (Consciousness-space), Jyotirlinga (Effulgent Linga), and so on. Each Vachanakara uses, as his signature, the name of his family or village deity at the end of every one of his Vachanas. But 'Linga' is the 'official' term used by all Vachanakaras.

The Vachanakaras, like the Vedantins, advocate the doctrine that Linga is *sat*, *cit*, *ānanda*, *nitya*, and *paripūrṇa*.

Cit • Many Vachanakaras describe Linga or Shiva in mystical expressions like *arivu* or *jñāna*, knowledge, *cit*, consciousness, *prakāśa*, effulgence, and *cit-prakāśa*, consciousness-effulgence. It is infinite, indivisible undifferentiated consciousness and is gender-free. It is present in us in the form of the *jīvātman*, individual self, bound by body, mind, and senses. Linga is omnipresent and it is wrong to think that it is present only in living beings and not in inanimate objects.

Sat • All things in the world are subject to constant change. But the Consciousness in them does not change. It is *sat*, real. All things come and go at different points of time, but the universal Consciousness neither comes nor goes, it always is. It is the unchanging substratum of all change. Just as the sea remains as it is, in spite of taking many forms—waves, bubbles, or foam—so also Linga remains unchanged in the midst of innumerable changes in the world, which is its transformation. In fact, if there were no unchanging reality, *sat*, no changing world could exist.

Ānanda • In their samadhi, yogis experience the unchanging Consciousness in contrast to the constantly changing mental states experienced in the usual waking life. That is the moment when they experience bliss, *ānanda*. Just as the Consciousness experienced in the state of samadhi is called *sat* and *cit*, so also it is called *ānanda*. *Ānanda* is the original nature of Consciousness and is not

derived from any external source. If Consciousness experienced in the mystic state is Linga, then Linga must be *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*.

Nitya • Linga is also *nitya*, eternal—beginningless and endless. One may ask the meaningful question, ‘What was the time of Shankaracharya?’ However, the question ‘Since when has Linga been in existence?’ is absurd, for Shiva is eternal. This implies that persons subject to birth and death should not be called God. Basavanna argues that the god Indra is born of Amritavati and Somashambhu, Brahma is born of Jyeshthadevi and Satyarshi, and Vishnu is born of Vasudeva and Devaki. ‘Does God Kudalasangamadeva who is beyond creation, maintenance, and destruction have parents?’⁵

Paripūrṇa • The word *paripūrṇa* as applied to Shiva means ‘all-pervasive’. While many theists refuse to think that God, being holy and perfect, exists in unholy places, the Vachanakaras think that Linga exists everywhere. Like the Upanishadic thinkers, they say that God is smaller than the smallest and bigger than the biggest. Statements like ‘Whichever way I look, you alone are, O Lord’, ‘You are the forest, and trees in it, and the animals that move about in it’ also speak of the Lingayat concept of God as omnipresent.

Though the world is entirely occupied by Linga, it does not exhaust him. Since it is said to be included in God, he must be conceived as both immanent and transcendent. In other words, the Lingayat position is one of panentheism and not pantheism.

Concept of Shakti

Since the God of Virashaivism carries out cosmic functions like creation, he must have shakti. The Vachanakaras have used the word ‘shakti’ in two distinct senses: In the sense of ‘power’, the word refers to a quality which makes one an efficient cause, and in the sense of ‘potency’ or ‘energy’ it refers to something which is able to produce some result out of itself. Thus, a goldsmith’s shakti to transform gold into ornaments is a power that makes him an efficient cause, whereas the shakti of a seed to become a tree is a potency that makes it a material or

substantial cause.

Shakti is not alien to Shiva, for it is his inextricable attribute, *viśeṣaṇa*. Shiva and shakti are interdependent in the sense that one cannot exist without the other. But they are not two different substances somehow coexisting. Actually, they are ontologically one and dual only logically—like a flower and its fragrance. The dynamic nature of Shiva is called shakti and his static nature is called *cit*. To stress this inseparable relation between the two, the world made of shakti is regarded as *aṣṭa-tanu*—eightfold body comprising the five elements, the soul, the sun, and the moon, which are the building blocks of the universe—of Shiva. Therefore, statements that Shiva becomes the world and shakti evolves into the world mean the same thing. It is for this reason that Linga is called both the material and the efficient cause of the universe.

Shakti exists in two forms: manifest, in the form of the world, and unmanifest, during the pre-creation state. Being insentient, it can neither change itself nor change Shiva, on whom it depends; it remains manifest or unmanifest only under the directions of Shiva, who is Consciousness. Shiva alone has the freedom to transform himself into the world or abstain from it.

Creation and the Soul

The Lingayat theory of creation resembles that of the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* as well as that of Kashmir Shaivism. According to the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, the universe arises from Prakriti and its constituents. They are related to the Creator, like body to soul. The Lingayat account resembles the accounts given in Kashmir Shaivism and Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy also, so far as the thirty-six principles are concerned; yet it has its own distinctive features. The Vachanakaras present the process of Creation as follows.⁶

Para-shiva, in the pre-Creation state, is called Shunya or Bayalu (Void), or Mahashunya (Great Void). He is not aware of anything in that stage because there is nothing other than him to be aware of. Nor is he aware of himself. But when he be-

comes aware of himself, he decides to create. That is when his shakti becomes agitated. This stage of Para-shiva is called Nishkala-linga, undivided Linga. His decision is called *cit-śakti* in Sanskrit and *nenahu* in Kannada.

Nishkala-linga divides himself into two aspects, *aṅga* and Linga. *Aṅga* is the group of individual souls, which are not separate from one another—their bodies, senses, and minds are not yet created. Simultaneously, the shakti of Nishkala-Linga is also divided into two: the shakti of Linga is called *kalā-śakti* and the shakti of *aṅga* is called *bhakti-śakti*. These are also called *pravṛtti-śakti* or *adhomāyā* and *nivṛtti-śakti* or *ūrdhva-māyā* respectively. The shakti of Linga or *śiva-śakti* is divided into *ādi-śakti*, *parā-śakti*, *icchā-śakti*, *jñāna-śakti*, and *kriyā-śakti*, out of which the *antahkaraṇas*, internal organs—*manas*, mind, *buddhi*, intellect, *citta*, mind-stuff, *ahamkāra*, ego, and *jīvātman*—the five sense organs, the motor organs like hands and legs, the five vital airs—*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *udāna*, *samāna*, and *vyāna*—and the *dhātus* such as bone, blood, flesh, and hair are made. They are also the causes of material objects—ocean, mountains, stones, trees, stars, and the like. Linga assumes five forms called *adhidēvatās*, superintending deities—Sadyojata, Vamadeva, Aghora, Tatpurusha, and Ishana—which control the five shaktis. In fact, *kalā-śakti* and *bhakti-śakti* are not different. The same shakti is *kalā-śakti* if involved in selfish purposes and *bhakti-śakti* if applied to spiritual purposes. Since *bhakti-śakti* raises the soul to a higher state, it is called *ūrdhva-māyā*, upward force, and since *kalā-śakti* makes human bondage stronger, it is called *adho-māyā*, downward force.

Making use of these building blocks emanating from Linga, Brahma—a form of Linga—creates the world of living and non-living beings. The bound souls receive bodies and minds in accordance with the merits and demerits gained in their lives before the dissolution of the universe. They are granted new bodies and minds so that they may make spiritual use of them in order to gain moksha. In this sense *aṅga* means the *pūjaka*, worshipper, and Linga the worshipped.

The thirty-six *tattvas*, principles of creation, are grouped under three heads: (i) Para-shiva qualified by shakti; (ii) five shaktis and five superintending deities; and (iii) five material elements, five sense organs, five motor organs, five vital airs, and five *antahkaraṇas*.

This division into *aṅga* and Linga is not a physical partition, *aṅga* existing in one part of space and Linga in another. The human personality, *aṅga*, itself is the locus where the two meet. Just as Shiva is infinite Consciousness qualified by infinite shakti, so also is *aṅga* a finite Linga qualified by finite shakti. The shaktis in the form of body and senses contain Shiva. It is said that Linga is especially manifest at six nodal points—*cakras* or *padmas*—along the spinal column. These *cakras* are: *ādhāra*, *svādhiṣṭhāna*, *maṇipūraka*, *anāhata*, *viśuddha*, and *ājñā*. A seventh *cakra* called *sahasrāra* also finds mention in Lingayat works. The Lingas that exist in them are called *ācāra-linga*, *guru-linga*, *śiva-linga*, *jaṅgama-linga*, *prasāda-linga*, and *mahā-linga*. The Linga that exists in the *sahasrāra* is called *śūnya-linga*. The six *cakras* are the modifications of the six shaktis—*cit-śakti* being the sixth. These six *cakras*, when successively trained and purified, can lead to the realization of the Linga present in them. Sometimes it is also said that Linga pervades every particle, and not merely the *cakras*, of the human personality. Therefore, the word *aṅga* does not mean the soul alone but also its body and senses, which are the products of shakti.

It follows that to the oldest philosophical question ‘Who am I?’ the Vachanakaras answer: ‘I am Linga, my origin is Linga, and my destination is Linga. I am not the body that carries with it the senses and *antahkaraṇas*; I am not even the empirical self subject to the six enemies of spiritual life, but am Shiva himself.’⁷ However, because of ignorance, I am not aware of my true nature and wrongly think that I am an individual independent of others and Para-shiva.

Though the soul is bound to the body, mind, and senses, it is not limited by them, because being conscious it can control and direct them either for selfish or for spiritual purposes. But it is also a fact

that it depends on them, being unable to see or think or perform any act without them.

One of the functions of the *jīvātman* is to receive the sensations reported by the senses, hold them together, subject them to analysis and synthesis, and compare and contrast them to reach appropriate conclusions. The *jīvātman* perceives by means of the senses and analyses and synthesizes by means of the *antahkaraṇas*. This means that it is the central processing unit, to which the senses and mind, as well as motor organs like legs and hands, are related. They cannot function without it, just as it cannot know or act without them. The *jīvātman* and the body interact in such a manner that the happiness of the soul is dependent on the well-being of the body.⁸

The Lingayat doctrine of the division of Nishkala-Linga into innumerable *aṅgas* implies that plurality of selves is not merely an appearance, as held by the doctrine of Advaita, but a reality. However, though the limited nature of the soul is real, reunification with God and indistinguishably merging with him is the coveted aim of a spiritual aspirant.

Many Lingayats claim that Lingayatism does not entertain the doctrine of karma and rebirth. Before we answer this claim it is necessary to distinguish between the two statements that the Lingayats are not subject to the law of karma and rebirth and that they do not believe in it. That they do believe in the law of karma is amply evidenced by their Vachanas, which state that they are born again and again due to neglect of their moral and religious duties in previous births. They also say the non-Lingayats—*bhavis*, those who are reborn—are subject to this same law. But they believe that the very fact that they are born in a Lingayat family ensures their liberation—freedom from karma and rebirth—provided they lead the life of a perfect Lingayat.

Moksha: Liberation

The Lingayats indiscriminately use terms like *śiva-sāyujya*, *advaita-sthiti*, *kaivalya*, *nirvāṇa*, *lingāṅga-sāmarasya*, and *bayalāguvudu*—merging in consciousness-space or attaining Shunya—as synonyms of moksha. Some of these terms have

specific connotations in other schools and, therefore, one cannot expect them to have the same meaning in Lingayatism as well. Let us then use the most widely used word ‘moksha’. One who attains moksha is called *lingaikya* or *śivaikya*, united with Linga or Shiva.

In contrast to the dualistic conception of Shaiva Siddhanta and Vishishtadvaita, that liberation consists in an after-death passage of the pure soul to the celestial abode where it maintains eternal companionship with God; the Lingayats conceive of liberation as consisting in the union of *aṅga*, the individual soul, with Linga, the universal Consciousness, in the embodied state. Some Vachanakaras overtly state that the liberated soul becomes Linga. It would be absurd to interpret their statement as meaning that the particular soul becomes the universal soul or that a part becomes the whole. What they imply is that the liberated person merges in Linga indistinguishably, as the following Vachana implies:

All the individual souls, which touch
the Linga become themselves Linga;
Just as all the rivers, which touch
the ocean themselves become ocean.⁹

Some Vachanakaras describe the *aikya*, union, of *aṅga* and Linga as each one entering into the other. This, however, does not mean that Shiva or the soul moves in space and time before they unite. Movement of Linga from A to B means its prior absence in B, and its departure from A means its absence in A. Similarly, the movement of the *aṅga* towards Linga implies the absence of the latter in the place of the former. In either case, motion implies that Linga is not omnipresent. This conclusion further implies the separation of *aṅga* from Linga. Both these conclusions stand opposed to Lingayat panentheism. The Lingayat concept of union simply means that the *aṅga*, which due to ignorance draws a fictitious line between itself and Linga, now recognizes that it is but an inseparable and indistinguishable part, *aṅga*, of Linga. This is the attainment of its natural original oneness with Linga.

One of the characteristics of the *sāmarasya*, har-

monious relation, between *aṅga* and Linga is loss of ego, *aham nāśa*. When the soul unites with Linga, it loses its individuality and begins to think that it is a vehicle of Linga. Just as the speed and direction of a vehicle are controlled by its driver, so the thoughts and actions of the *lingaikya* are controlled and directed by Linga. What this means is expressed clearly by Chenna Basavanna:

Your body is in my body and my body is in yours;
Your life is in mine and mine in yours;
Your senses are in mine and mine in yours ...
I am camphor and you are flame,
I merged in you.¹⁰

If the *lingaikya* wipes out the distinction between his body and senses and those of Linga, does he not enjoy sensory perceptions like smell and taste? No, says Chenna Basavanna in another Vachana:

Sitting at the door of my nose, it is you
Who enjoy the pleasure of good smell;
Sitting at the door of my tongue, it is you
Who enjoy the pleasure of good taste;
Sitting at the door of my eyes, it is you
Who enjoy the pleasure of good sights; ...
Because I know I am only a machine
Handled by you.¹¹

The two Vachanas quoted above unmistakably imply that liberation is attained in an embodied state¹² and that loss of ego is an inevitable result of liberation. Loss of ego means not only considering oneself a vehicle of Para-shiva but also being totally occupied by Linga. Morally speaking, the *lingaikya* is free from all selfish motives, which bind us to karma and rebirth; and since *lingaikyas* do not undertake any selfish act, they are free from karma and rebirth.

The Lingayat concept of *jīvanmukti*, embodied liberation, has a feature that distinguishes it from the Advaitic as well as the Vishishtadvaitic attitude to the human body. Bondage, according to Advaita, is the result of superimposition of the qualities of non-consciousness—the body, *antahkaraṇas*, and the like—on Consciousness and those of Consciousness on non-consciousness. On the attainment of jnana, enlightenment, the liberated person

realizes that all non-consciousness, including one's own body, is maya. Some Advaitins think that 'for the *jīvanmukta* there is no body at all'.¹³

The Vishishtadvaitins think that the body, which is the result of *prārabdha-karma*, causes limitations to the soul and, therefore, as long as there is the body, liberation is not possible. In other words, embodied liberation is a contradiction in terms, like the son of a barren woman. If at all liberation is possible, it can be only after death.

Similarly, the body-mind complex made of Prakriti, according to Sankhya-Yoga, is the cause of bondage for the soul, Purusha, and liberation consists in *vīryoga*, separation, of the Purusha from all evolutes of Prakriti. From this it appears that all these schools look down upon the body and mind.

For a Lingayat, the body is neither an illusion nor a bane, but is real and vital, like the shakti out of which it is made. The Lingayat regards the body as a *prasāda*, gift, of Linga. Basavanna and Urilinga Peddi consider the human body to be the temple of Linga.¹⁴ The body is graced by Para-shiva so that humans, by making proper use of it, may attain moksha. The body thus graced is perceived not as 'food-made', but as *prasāda-kāya*, 'prasada-made'. Chenna Basavanna thinks that the body-mind complex is a *sāla*, 'loan', given by Linga. Therefore, to him moksha consists in repayment of the loan:

O Shiva, I don't enter your world
Without repaying your loan.
I return the earth element to the earth element,
I return the water element to the water element,
I return the fire element to the fire element, ...
Then only I enter you.¹⁵

The belief in *jīvanmukti* also implies that the body, senses, and mind of the *lingaikya*, which are products of shakti, become as pure as in their original form and thus are eligible to merge in the original shakti of Para-shiva. Therefore, to say that the *aṅga* merges in Linga is to say that the soul and its *bhakti-śakti* merges in Linga and its shakti. Adayya says: 'The senses having lost their separateness have now merged in Linga; the sense objects having lost

their separateness have now merged in Linga ... Thus the body of *śaraṇa* has become the body of Brahman (*brahmāṇḍa*).¹⁶ He clearly implies total union. In the state of bondage, humans wrongly think of the body and senses as their own and do all kinds of acts for their sake. But in the state of moksha they see these as belonging to Para-shiva.

Unity of God, World, and Soul

Another distinguishing feature of a *lingaikya* is his perception of himself, God, and the world as one and inseparable. Therefore, he perceives nothing other than himself. Chenna Basavanna says: 'When the liberated person thinks that he is the whole world and the whole world is he, he does not distinguish himself from God, and for him there cannot be anything else.'¹⁷

A person who has not yet realized his true self is subject to illusion. He may distinguish between reality and appearance. But for a liberated person there are no such two things as reality and appearance, or subject and object; there is but one. He cannot call it 'reality' either, because there is no appearance from which he has to distinguish it; there is no object which could be 'other' to him. For this reason Basavanna says: 'When self-realization has taken place, what is the meaning of "God's world" or "mortal world"? There is no difference at all.'¹⁸ ❧

Notes and References

1. Although the terms 'Virashaivism' and 'Lingayatism' have been used interchangeably both in religious and philosophical contexts by the Vachana writers as well as Sanskrit authors from the twelfth century onwards, it has been suggested that they denote two different faith traditions. Virashaivism, founded on the Agamas and some other Sanskrit works, advocates polytheism, Vedic rites and sacrifices, the practice of caste discrimination including the primacy of brahmanas and inferiority of shudras, worship of the linga established in temples, and so on—and to this extent it is an orthodox Hindu sect. Lingayatism rejects all these and advocates equality of the wearers of *iṣṭalinga*. The religion of the Vachanas is a protest against and a clear departure from Agamic Virashaivism. Therefore, although the word 'Virashaivism' is occasionally used

in this article, it means not Agamic Virashaivism but only Lingayatism of the Vachanas.

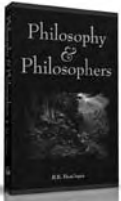
2. *Brahma Sutra*, 1.3.34–8.
3. For details, read Dr Immadi Shivabasava Svamigalu, *Siddhanta-shikhamani Hagu Srikarabhashya—Nijada Nilavu* (Mysore: Samvahana, 2003).
4. *Samagra-vachana-samputa*, ed. M M Kalburgi et al. (Bengaluru: Kannada Book Authority, 2001), vol. 6, verse 47.
5. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, verse 545.
6. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, verses 38–9, 42, 52, 63, 74.
7. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, verse 969.
8. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, verses 494, 645.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. 9, verse 427.
10. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, verse 1046.
11. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, verse 1047.
12. Prabhudeva and others insist that we achieve liberation only in the embodied state. See *Samagra-vachana-samputa*, vol. 2, verse 110 and vol. 6, verse 514.
13. T M P Mahadevan, *Insights of Advaita* (Mysore: Mysore University, 1970), 107.
14. *Samagra-vachana-samputa*, vol. 1, verse 821 and vol. 6, verse 357.
15. *Chenna Basavannanavara Vachanagalu*, ed. R C Hiremeth (Dharwad: Karnataka University, 1971), verse 1248.
16. *Samagra-vachana-samputa*, vol. 6, verse 895.
17. *Chenna Basavannanavara Vachanagalu*, verse 1344.
18. *Samagra-vachana-samputa*, vol. 1, verse 947.

(Continued from page 149)

Total cessation of the bondage of the cycle of birth and death forms the general concept of freedom in Indian philosophy. However, Vishishtadvaita holds that the ultimate goal is not mere freedom from bondage, as in the transcendental realm the jiva does not lose its identity but enjoys fully the bliss of Brahman *paripūrṇa-brahmānubhava*. Further, omniscience, the true nature of the jiva, becomes manifest in this state, as its *dharmabhūta-jñāna* is freed from all constraints. Though the jiva attains a status of *sāmya*, equality, with Brahman and enjoys the bliss of Brahman, an ontological difference exists between the two. The jiva cannot share with Brahman its unique status of being the cause of the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe. All the same, moksha is a positive state of existence for the jiva in which it eternally enjoys the bliss of Brahman. ❧

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



Philosophy and Philosophers

R K DasGupta

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. E-mail: rmic@vsnl.com. 2008. 170 pp. Rs 125.

‘A part from man,’ says Schopenhauer, ‘no being wonders at his own existence.’ The perennial problems thrown up by this philosophic wonder have always caused a sensation—from the days of Thales in ancient Greece through to the twenty-first century ‘scholar extraordinaire’ R K DasGupta. The book under review offers us a good opportunity to read and realize some of these great problems of philosophy, both Indian and Western, and most of the nine essays are real gems, emanating from a brilliant mind and an ever-agile conscience.

Through his first essay entitled ‘Dante and Aquinas’ we get a glimpse into the rare conjunction of poetry and philosophy. Following the footsteps of Aristotle, DasGupta says that poetry is the most philosophic of all writings, and that the integration of reasoning and faith seen in Aquinas and Dante is something spiritually and intellectually more satisfying than the effort of a similar integration made by the Cambridge Platonists of the seventh century.

In his second essay, a brilliant masterpiece, the author has tried to defend ‘Hegel’s Philosophy of History’ as ‘translating the language of religion into that of thought’. DasGupta deserves our tribute for bringing out a certain philosophic truth, a new basis for an idealist view of man’s destiny on earth at a time when erudite forms of pragmatism have brought the world to a catastrophe.

The author’s soft corner for Schopenhauer ‘goes beyond conventional appreciation’. Schopenhauer’s reaction against German rationalism was ‘aimed at saving man’s existence from stunting rationality’ and this reaction, DasGupta says, ‘was important more for its literary than philosophical consequence’. The wisdom of Schopenhauer, DasGupta adds, lies in his pessimism promoting goodness, thereby allowing

the philosopher to move as a lonely and disconsolate man in the light of his soul.

DasGupta considers ‘Russell as a Man of Letters’, and as a versatile writer Russell receives his tribute for great simplicity of style. His political and social prose have both charm and power, but despite the eloquence and excellence of this great soul, no particular book of Russell—according to the author—is a great book, in the sense of a classic in world literature.

The essay on ‘Max Müller as an Indologist’ gives us a lucid pen picture of this German scholar, who spent most of his time for his stupendous study of Indian literary and philosophical classics at Oxford but was nevertheless regarded by a large number of modern Indian savants as being reminiscent of an Upanishadic sage.

‘Spinoza and Śāṅkarite Monism’ is a remarkable comparative essay on monism. The monism of both these exponents has vital links with religion and ethics but, according to DasGupta, Spinoza’s monism appears to be weakened by his commitment to the Jewish philosophy of a personal God whereas Shankara preserves the purity of his monism by rejecting the empirical world as something out of account in his metaphysics. The essays on ‘Indian Philosophy’ and ‘The Ethical Ideas of August Comte’ are also two learned testimonials of the author’s multi-dimensional approach.

Last but not least, the essay entitled ‘Swami Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedanta’—delivered at the Asiatic Society as the ‘Indira Gandhi Memorial Lecture for 1998’—shows that DasGupta is fascinated by Vivekananda, the man who, according to him, raises a new voice and represents a new spirit which distinguishes his ideas from those of classical Vedanta. In the fourteenth century Madhavacharya produced his classic volume *Sarva-Darshana-Sangraha*, and DasGupta hopes this will be supplemented in the future by a volume that would include Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedanta.

This compilation will prove stimulating reading for students of literature and philosophy, and I personally feel sad that I could not finish the review

before the author's demise. The introduction by Dr Radharaman Chakraborty, an eminent scholar and writer, has added to the grace of this volume.

Prof. Amalendu Chakraborty
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**A Vision for Hinduism:
Beyond Hindu Nationalism**
Jeffery D Long

I B Tauris, 6 Salem Road, London W2
4BU. Website: www.ibtauris.com. 2007.
xvi + 224 pp. Rs 995.

This book has been written in the conviction that Hinduism's pluralistic vision may be its greatest gift to the world: a vision of unity in diversity that can provide a model for how the world's religions and various other ideologies might learn to co-exist.' This is the remarkably clear and firm conviction on which Jeffery D Long organizes his book.

Spelling out his own credentials to make such a claim, Long says: 'I may say I have adopted Hinduism. But it is equally true that Hinduism adopted me', giving 'a warm and welcoming environment in which I can pursue my spiritual aspirations, aspirations best described by the Hindu tradition itself'. Moreover, he believes in the basic Hindu tenets such as karma, rebirth, and liberation, and, above all, he adds, 'I have taken *dīkṣā* under a guru in a teaching lineage, or *sampradāya*, that is traced back to an enlightened being.' All this is the primary 'source' behind this study.

But this is a remarkable study in more ways than what the author's adherence to Hinduism seems to suggest and circumscribe. This is a *comprehensive* exploration derived from two major sources: the dynamic role of Ramakrishna-Vedanta in the area of religious harmony and an interpretive strategy drawn from 'the process theology' exemplified, notably, in the work of David Ray Griffin and others with antecedents in A N Whitehead. Thus, the book is certainly a 'vision' for Hinduism—even as it transforms the vision into an experiential truth as demonstrated by Ramakrishna-Vedanta—and it proffers an approach that is not merely academic.

It is this fascinating re-visioning that infuses the book with a unitive vision which is singularly free from the usual clichés and pious jargon of exhortations. To infer from journals published in the US—

notably *American Vedantist* which, from the issues I could read, seems to have substantial potential for an enormously distinct originality of approach—the Ramakrishna tradition is now like a cosmic fish which no specific cultural jar can confine. It is comparable to Sri Ramakrishna's image of the mind as a white cloth, able to absorb all colours, even the ones which are bizarre and wild, rooted in apparent misreadings and misperceptions, masked as the quest for authentic texts and linguistic nuances of so-called exacting scholarship.

Long studies the implications of religious pluralism over five chapters, covering 'The Contested Future of Hinduism', an outline of 'Hindu Process Theology and Religious Pluralism', a relational ontology grounded in Hindu religious pluralism, with fresh ground covered in the area of the convergence of Jain and process metaphysics, 'Ramakrishna Meets Whitehead'—perhaps the most interesting chapter—and finally his vision for Hinduism.

Studies of religious harmony in the context of pluralism are mostly 'matters of taste, rather than of profound commitment' or they are offshoots of an 'anti-modern or neo-traditionalist' bias, basing itself on a text, teacher, or institution. This could reflect firmness in a positive way, but is not always exempt from fundamentalist tendencies.

Process theology—Hindu process theology specifically—steers clear of these extremes. 'I conceive of Hindu process theology—and by implication the pluralistic model of religion based upon it—as offering ... a third way out of this contemporary situation, at least on a conceptual level. What I have in mind is adherence to a religiously informed worldview not on blind faith, but on the basis of the modern humanistic commitment to the autonomy of reason reflecting on experience,' says Long.

He finds this in the Ramakrishna tradition, in which the Great Master and Whitehead can meet amicably. For, the Ramakrishna tradition, like Whitehead's philosophic frames, has 'the single most compelling feature of process philosophy, on my assessment,' says Long, 'which is precisely its attempt to take every element of our experience, to the exclusion of none, as the data for its reflections.' In short, the 'whole experience of living,' as Whitehead puts it, reminds us that God 'is not *before* all creation, but *with* all creation'.

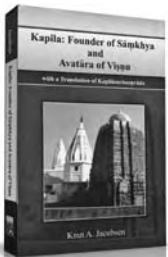
Elaborating the specifics of Ramakrishna-Vedanta, the author says: 'Beyond its spiritual methodology of direct experience, Ramakrishna Vedānta is also dis-

tinct from Advaita and other forms of Vedānta in terms of its worldview. Again, Ramakrishna Vedānta conceives of itself as a synthesis of all previous forms of Vedānta.' Above all, 'the religious pluralism of Ramakrishna Vedānta is based on these experiences, perceived as experimental proof of the validity of the world's major religions.'

In effect, *A Vision for Hinduism* transcends the 'Hindu' limits and is one of the most fascinating—and convincing—studies to emerge in recent times. While it is a subtle rejoinder to notions of strident Hindutva, it is also an invaluable study of the Ramakrishna-Vedānta tradition, 'a mega spiritual trend' of our times. It is as indispensable as it is timely. I do hope it will be available to readers outside the US and UK as an affordable paperback.

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***Kapila: Founder of Sāṃkhya
and Avatāra of Viṣṇu***

Knut A. Jacobsen

Munshiram Manoharlal, PO Box 5715,
54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055.
E-mail: mrml@mantraonline.com. 2008.
xii + 250 pp. Rs 650.

Some of the loftiest ideas to have influenced people of all ages have come from the creative genius of the humble Hindu, who seldom cared to record a name or other personal details in their work of art or literature. So many works are attributed to Vyasa, Narada, Kapila, Shankaracharya, and other such luminaries that a lot of research has been required to decipher which are authentically theirs. More often than not the author's identity remains disputable: some later writers attached recognized names to their works in order to gain royal or social credence, while others dedicated their works to their illustrious preceptors—happy for their own part to pass into oblivion. The Hindus have often been accused of a lack of historical awareness, generally never bothering to keep detailed objective accounts of events or personages. The Advaita philosophy's premise of the unreality of the world is supposed to have been the cause of this lacuna; suffice it to say that this is certainly not the whole truth.

The book under review presents both historical and contemporary material on Kapila, and on that foundation endeavours to answer questions about

his identity: not so much as a historical character, but as a figure of the religious imagination. It also has a translation of 'Kapilasurisamvada', Kapila's teachings to Asuri, which appears in some versions of the Mahabharata. The author is a professor in history of religions at University of Bergen and has authored and edited fifteen books and over sixty articles in various journals. This book is the result of his painstaking research and it presents the reader with a complete picture of Kapila. The author accepts a plurality of traditions and therefore many Kapilas.

In one chapter Jacobsen details the concept of divinity—Ishvara, Brahma and the embodied beings, Mahatmyasharira, Prakritilaya, and Hiranyagarbha—as occurring in Sankhya and Yoga, and concludes that the idea of the Kapila avatara is founded on theism. However, the Kapila of the Puranas differs from the other avatars of Vishnu: he encourages withdrawal from the world by realizing the separation of the Purusha from Prakriti, because the world as stated by Sankhya is fundamentally associated with pain. Also, two different Kapilas appear in the two lists of avatars in the Bhagavata. Sagara Kapila is identified with the Kapila who taught Krishna-bhakti, and the Sankhya Kapila taught his disciple Asuri the Sankhya system of philosophy. A merging of jnana and bhakti was probably envisaged by combining these two Kapilas; but all these can only be surmises.

The principal portion of the book is taken up by the 'Kapilasurisamvada' with its translation and copious notes. This is the first complete translation of the text and hence valuable. The original text has some missing links and anomalies; for example, there are two sets of questions, and the answers given by Kapila are different. This leads Jacobsen to conclude that there were probably two authors. The influence of the Upanishads is seen in the second part, while the first set of questions delineates the Sankhya philosophy. Kapila, the founder of this philosophy, quotes other authorities, so this probably is a development of an earlier system.

The author has travelled extensively to various places connected with Kapila, and his photos of all the *kshetras* connected with the sage point to the latter's abiding influence on Indian thought. Some hymns addressed to Kapila are also given with their translations. The last chapter reconciles the views of various Kapilas with the author concluding that conflicts with regard to interpretation cannot be avoided when the emphasis is on doctrine and teachings and when coherence and consistency are sought. Devotees,

however, are not bothered by all these details—they just want sacred stories to inspire their devotion. In spite of this diversity of traditions, inclusiveness and a tendency towards unity are clearly palpable.

The book is definitely a welcome addition to historico-philosophical studies, especially on Sankhya, and the author's insights into the parallels with Vedanta and Yoga are appreciable. One can look forward to similar studies on personalities like Vyasa and Narada.

Swami Atmajnananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



A Bouquet of Nondual Texts

Adi Shankara;
trans. Dr H Ramamoorthy
and Nome

Society of Abidance in Truth, 1834
Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, California
95060. E-mail: sat@cruzio.com. 2006.
xviii + 262 pp.

For more than a thousand years Sri Shankaracharya has cast a spell on Indian life through his teachings on the knowledge of Brahman. Translations of his works have enabled his wisdom to cut across borders and language barriers, and the last century saw the arrival of many new translations to aid this tower of light in dispelling collective 'ignorance'.

The book under review is a collection—as the title says, a bouquet—albeit a small one, of some of the Advaita texts authored by the acharya, and each of its eight flowers is fresh and fragrant with Sri Shankara's highest teaching: The self within us is in reality Brahman.

Not for casual reading, this book is sacred writ—each word needing to be meditated upon repeatedly. The translation has been made keeping in mind the essential message of Advaita, at the slight literary expense of a precise English reproduction. The original shlokas are given in Sanskrit, in Devanagari characters, with accompanying roman transliteration; there is then a word-for-word translation followed by the complete verse in simple English.

The first text is 'Brahmanuchintanam' (Meditation on Brahman), consisting of twenty-nine shlokas; second is the five-versed 'Advaita-pancharatnam' (The Five Jewels of Non-duality); third comes 'Nirvanamanjari' (Bouquet of Liberation), containing twelve verses; the fourth is 'Anatma-sri-vigarhana-

prakaranam' (Treatise in Deprecation of Acquisition That is Non-self), with eighteen verses; next is 'Advaitanubhuti' (The Experience of Non-duality), the largest of the texts with eighty-four verses; this is followed by 'Jivanmuktananda-lahari' (The Wave of Bliss of the Liberated-while-alive), of seventeen verses; 'Svarupanusandhanashtakam' (The Octet of the Inquiry into One's Own Nature) is the penultimate text, with nine verses; and the anthology rounds off with the twenty-one shlokas of 'Brahma-jnanavalimala' (The Rows of Garlands of Brahman-knowledge). A small introduction precedes the eight texts.

The publishers have not spared any expense in the production of this book, which is set in large typeface and an open airy layout especially conducive to reflection. There are commentaries or explanatory notes; but for anyone acquainted even slightly with Sri Shankara's philosophy these would have been superfluous in any case—those coming to the texts for the first time should find that the translations alone allow one to grasp the message this book promotes.

Swami Satyamayananda
Acharya, Probationers' Training Centre
Belur Math



Vedas: Traditional and Modern Perspectives

Ed. Dr V Kameswari, Dr K S Balasubramanian, Dr TV Vasudeva

The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 84 Thiru Vi Ka Road, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: ksrinst@gmail.com. 2007. viii + 311 pp. Rs 250.

A collection of academic articles in Sanskrit, English, and Tamil the book is arranged in three sections. The first comprises nine papers presented at a Vedic Sammelana organized by the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute in 1990. These papers deal with the relevance of the Vedas in modern times (Ramanuja Tatacharya), the present status of Vedic studies (C R Swaminathan), the difference in Sayana's interpretation of some mantras occurring in both the Rig Veda and the Yajur Veda (Vidyadhara Sastri Bhide), some euphonic combinations in the Rig Veda Pratishakhya (Balasubrahmanya Ghanapathi), the classification of Shatarudriya mantras (S Seshadri Ghanapathi), some features of the Talavakara recension of the Sama Veda (T N M Iyengar), the Sama Veda as the saviour of all

worlds (S Srauti), the *Shrauta Sutra* of Apastamba (Viswanatha Srauti), and common features between the Vedas and Agamas (R Subrahmanya).

The second section comprises nine articles reprinted from the *Journal of Oriental Research*, published between 1927 and 1951, on Rig Veda 4.30.19 (A Venkatasubbiah), the *adhyatmika* interpretation of Indra as Atman in the Rig Veda and the Maruts as *Pranas* (O K Anantalakshmi), the meanings of *na-satyau* and *dasrau*, which are usually and incorrectly regarded as synonyms (P S S Sastri), support of this view from the Bhagavata 2.2.29 (K B Iyer), the jurisprudential bearings of the story of Nabhanedishtha in the *Taittiriya Samhita* and the *Aitareya Brahmana* (R Vasudeva Sarma), the Vedic attitude to Sati (T R Venkatarama Sastri), the origin of the Sama Veda (W Caland), the chronology of the Vedic commentators (C Kunhan Raja), and the history and future of Vedic study (Louis Renou).

The third section comprises four articles by the academic faculty of the institute, dealing with Vedic studies in ancient Tamil Nadu (C S Sundaram), Vedic literature on plant science (V Kameswari), elements of cytogenetics in ancient Sanskrit literature (K S Balasubramanian), and the significance of the 'Ratri Sukta' of the Rig Veda (T V Vasudeva).

Synopses in English have been provided for the eight articles in Sanskrit and the one in Tamil. Some of the articles are short and of the nature of popular contributions, which may arouse popular interest in the subject, whereas some others are studies of research value. Swaminathan has presented a brief outlook on the status of traditional Vedic learning in India. In view of the very small number of followers of the Jaiminiya school, recent attempts at the revival of the Jaiminiya tradition (Iyengar) will be welcomed by all. Sundaram's article is rich in information about the propagation of Vedic studies and its impact in Tamil Nadu.

The reprinted articles are obviously no new contributions, but some of them continue to be relevant and valuable. Caland's article dealing with the origin of the Sama Vedic texts clears up some obscure points in the development of the Sama Vedic literature and reflects his depth and insight. The chronology of the commentators of the Vedas is also an important contribution. Renou's thoughts on the history and future of Vedic studies deserve special mention; he suggests therein some areas in which research may be profitably undertaken—for example, regarding the function of ritual in Vedic mythology. The data

provided in these old publications do, however, need revision in some cases, for relevant new publications have since appeared.

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Sanskrit and Science

Ed. Dr V Kameswari, Dr K S Balasubramanian, Dr T V Vasudeva

The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute. 2008. xii + 191 pp. Rs 250.

This book is a compilation of papers contributed to two seminars—the first on 'Sanskrit and Science', held on 9 October 1994, and the second on 'Sanskrit and Medical Science', held on 23 January 1995 to mark the golden jubilee of the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute.

There are eleven papers presented in all; five of these appear under the heading 'Sanskrit, Astronomy and Computer Science', three under 'Sanskrit and Medical Science', and the final three under 'Sanskrit and Other Sciences'. All the papers have been written by specialists in the respective fields and so carry the stamp of authority—unfortunately they also go well above the head of the general reader!

Sanskrit came to the attention of computer scientists about half a century ago, with the discovery that it forms the ideal medium for computer translation. Three of the papers in the first part cover the technicalities involved in language processing through computers, with special reference to Sanskrit. These papers are highly technical, but contain a lot of vital information. The other two papers concern philosophy and astronomy, and make easier reading.

The second part deals predominantly with Ayurveda, India's contribution to medical science. This domain is gaining increasing importance all over the world, due to the interest recently generated around alternate medical systems. A knowledge of Sanskrit is mandatory for the study of the primary Ayurvedic sources, as is an understanding of the Sankhya philosophy on which it is based. All three papers in this section are noteworthy, and the third, which discusses the importance of yoga, is particularly valuable. At the time of the visit of Chinese travellers to ancient India it was common practice for a yogi to be an expert on Ayurveda and vice versa.

The last part has papers on cartography, Svārodaya Yoga, and agriculture. These are highly educative and present information not ordinarily available or known to the general public.

The institute should be complimented for bringing out this volume, first in 1997 and now in a revised edition. It gives the reader a comprehensive idea of the broad sweep of the Sanskrit language, which is now recognized as an international, and not merely Indian, heritage. It is the duty of every right-thinking person to preserve it for posterity.

Dr N V C Swamy

Dean of Academic Programmes

Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana
Bengaluru



The Truth Will Set You Free

Svāmī Pūrṇā

New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Phase I,
New Delhi 110 028. Email: nab@vsnl.in.
2008. 151 pp. Rs 175.

Humanity has always striven to attain the truth that lies beyond mundane realities. This search has proved demanding and the supra-mundane truth elusive. Philosophers have debated the nature of truth and the means to its knowledge. That this knowledge will free one from all suffering has, however, been the settled conviction of many for ages. More than forty books available in the market with the words 'the truth will set you free' in the title confirm the human obsession with truth.

Svami Purna, with his knowledge of both science and Indian philosophy, has written yet another book on this subject. Stressing on the universality and uniqueness of truth, he coaxes the reader to see through the illusion or maya of the phenomenal world. He tells us how to transcend the petty ego by restraint of the senses and an unshakable faith in Divinity. Emphasizing that a strict moral discipline is a precursor to spiritual life, he advocates uncompromisingly holding on to truth. 'Adjustment' is a euphemism for moral laxity and will not help in our quest for truth.

Celebrating brahmacharya and vegetarianism, Svami Purna, presents a holistic view of physical, mental, and spiritual health. He tabulates the features of the three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Portraying the interconnectedness of body and mind, he enumerates the five causes of all physical and mental

diseases as suggested by the Swiss Renaissance physician Paracelsus: bodily disharmony, environmental toxins, negative mental states, corrupted influences of the world-soul, and divine action and judgement manifest as karma. He reminds us that every action bears fruit and that even mass destruction is a play of the Divine and the result of collective karma.

We are told that all beings are interconnected like Indra's pearls: 'In one exquisite pearl in the chain shines the reflection of all the other pearls of Indra' (56). Bringing out nuggets of Indian spiritual wisdom through mythological anecdotes, the author gives us glimpses into the paths of bhakti, yoga, and jnana. Christening Kundalini Yoga as 'Poorna Yoga', he teaches the way to systematically bring the awareness of higher truth by controlling our body and mind.

Written in a lucid and gripping style, with examples from everyday lives, this slim volume gives a roadmap to attaining the knowledge of truth. It invites us to the process of 'seeking the lotus within'.

Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



It's All a Matter of Attitude!

J P Vaswani; comp. Dr Prabha
Sampath and Krishna Kumari

Sterling Paperbacks, A-59 Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110 020. E-mail: ghai@nde.vsnl.net.in. 2006. 160 pp. Rs 100.

Stories, in general, are interesting and educative, but not all of them inspire the reader to change their perspective or lead a better life. What is more, in today's world who has time for stories? Tales from epics, legends, and folklore are no longer narrated in family circles. Traditionally, verses from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, *Nitishataka*, or *Panchatantra* were taught to children at home. Today, they have been commercially produced and such serials only restrict the otherwise rich imagination of fresh and young minds. Transfer of culture from one generation to the next was never as neglected as it is today. But there is hope! Thinking people are striving to compensate for the loss by publishing books that carry noble ideas, in an appealing format.

Dada J P Vaswani has become a symbol of tolerance and love. He has been inspiring people to follow higher ideals in life and to give generously to the

needy by preaching a proactive religion that appeals, while soothing the troubled and afflicted. His mel-low voice needs to be heard in these troubled times. The book under review is a compilation of seventy-five simple but very appealing stories narrated by Dada in his discourses and books. Each one of them touches us and effectively conveys a virtue that can make life richer.

The mantra that Dada offers through this book is: Change your attitude and change your life! Dr S Radhakrishnan's reply to John F Kennedy, former US president, is worth remembering: 'We can't change bad things, Mr President, but we can change our attitude towards them.' Dada gets this advice from a cripple in Pune: 'Life is a matter of habit. If you start complaining, there is so much to complain about. It is the attitude that counts.' The parable of the sack of worries, Avvaiyar's meeting with Aivel and the idea of *atithi devo bhava*, the strength of belief that made Walter Davis achieve the impossible, the vain crane parable, Oliver Goldsmith's unostentatious generosity, Tolstoy's story of the shoemaker who was waiting to receive Christ, the Argentine golfer Roberto de Vincenzo's giving without judging, anecdotes and sayings from Buddha, Rabia, and Gandhi—the list is long. Each story is capable of inspiring the reader for a lifetime—a novel way of *jnana dana*. Expressive and well-drawn sketches interspersed between the texts add to the charm of the stories.

I would gladly recommend this book of stories to the young, and more so to the worldly-wise. One story a day with all the family members listening to the reading and trying to put the ideals into practice is a good prescription. A faultless work at a very nominal price, the book must reach all corners and help build a saner society. Some more books of this kind will be ever welcome, for they teach priceless and ageless truths.

Swami Atmajnananda



**Life in Indian Monasteries:
Reminiscences about Monks
of the Ramakrishna Order**

Swami Bhaskarananda

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai
600 004. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com.
2009. xii + 204 pp. Rs 70.

The Ramakrishna Order is now more than a hundred years old. Established on 1 May 1897 in Kol-

kata, it has grown from strength to strength during the past century. It was the genius of Swami Vivekananda that conceived of this idea, but the inspiration was Sri Ramakrishna himself. Swamiji gave it such a strong foundation that it has since been able to build upon itself a magnificent superstructure.

Where exactly does the strength of this organization lie? Umpteen are the cases in India of a great spiritual power appearing and starting a movement; but seldom does the movement survive that power for more than a few years or decades before disintegrating into factions and disappearing. If one has to look for the secret that has sustained the Ramakrishna Order down the years, one has to understand its ideals and see how these ideals have been more important than mere individuals.

This Order has been blessed with several monks who have shown by their exemplary lives how these ideals can be realized without being compromised in any way. Each brick that has contributed to the superstructure is perfect in its own way, lending its mite for the sustainability of the whole organization. This book is a testimony to such great monks.

The purpose of the author in compiling these reminiscences in the form of a book is to record for posterity the way the ideals of the Order have been upheld by the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and their disciples in turn. It is not only an acknowledgement of their contributions, but also a pointer to existing and future monks as to how they should conduct themselves in order to uphold these ideals.

The book is arranged in three sections. The first section is devoted to the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the second to the second generation of monks. The third section contains a report about one particular monk, Swami Shantananda, not written by the author, Swami Bhaskarananda, but by a brother monk. In the first two sections the author has set down either his own direct experiences or what he has heard from his elders or brother monks. There is no question about the authenticity of the reports, especially for those familiar with the biographies of some of the monks referred to here.

What comes out of the reports as a common thread is the utter devotion and surrender of these monks to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. As one reads through the book, one feels oneself elevated to a different ethereal plane altogether. One also gets a feeling how fortunate India is, to be served by such distinguished sons. Dharma has always been the middle name of

Bharata Mata; but of late there has been a risk that this position could be taken by 'Corruption' instead. When one reads this book, however, one realizes that there is still hope; there are still several lamps burning here, shedding their light on dharma to keep it alive.

Albert Einstein is supposed to have said about Mahatma Gandhi: 'Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.' The same remark can be made about those monks who have been referred to in this book. Swami Bhaskarananda has earned the eternal gratitude of lovers of India for highlighting the fact that Sanatana Dharma is still a way of life being practised in the country. May his tribe increase!

Dr N V C Swamy



Plant Lives: Borderline Beings in Indian Traditions
Ellison Banks Findly

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007.
E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2008.
xxxii + 617 pp. Rs 1,095.

A creditable research volume, *Plant Lives* seeks to integrate received religious traditions and mystic encounters regarding trees with the common man's experiential at-one-ment with nature. Ms Findly misses neither the forest nor the trees, and even manages to pierce into those subtle realms that form the creative beginnings, motivations, and formulations of this satellite, the Earth.

The tree has always been a ubiquitous presence in Indian lives. Both the Vedic and Shramanic strains of Indian religion have had trees as part of their mythology. If Shiva is worshipped with the leaves of the bilva tree, the Buddha has made the pipal a sacramental image, while the Krishna legend is entangled with the heavenly Parijata. Millennia have passed, but the reverence has not diminished. Even today, women go round the banyan tree and perform Vatasavatri Vrata, and also worship the entwined growth of the pipal and neem trees by celebrating their wedding. Sacred groves like Vrindaban and Naimisharanya continue to attract the faithful. A glance at the amount of space given to trees and shrubs in Indian literature is enough to assure us that India is an environmentalist's delight.

Plant Lives handles many of these points with a generous sprinkling of quotes and seeks to probe the origin of certain Indian concepts like ahimsa. But the book is also an example of how risky it is to do research depending on translations alone. When Ms Findly quotes an *Isha Upanishad* passage as saying, 'the sannyasin must live only on food that is abandoned voluntarily and spontaneously' (31), one becomes wary. For the Upanishad has no such passage and the Shramanic life of a monk was not part of the ancient Vedic-Upanishadic teaching.

The weightiness of the research-inputs apart, *Plant Lives* affords a rich fare of several threads that we can take up ourselves and explore on our own. Are trees beings carrying karma? Can we engage in a conversation with a tree? Can we enter the realm of a tree's psyche? If plants also have life, are vegetarians murderers? 'That plants are both living and edible, then, presents Indian traditions with a paradox, especially in those pathways where *ahimsa* is practiced. One must eat, and food was once living. Whenever and whatever one eats, violence will happen in getting the food to the dinner table' (386).

According to Ms Findly, this problem is solved by considering plants as simply 'food that moves through the cosmic cycle' and in any case, 'because plants are normally hierarchically low, they will now be understood as those who suffer the least when killed'. Such convoluted conclusions may not lead us to illumination about past practices or future prospects, but they underline the anxiety of the Western mind to observe the integrality of Indian ethos and draw lessons from such an understanding. There is certainly admiration in *Plant Lives* for the manner in which Indians have attributed sacral qualities to nature and thus conserved the gifts of God to humans.

This has brought Ms Findly to some important contemporary movements. The Chipko Andolan to save forests in the Himalayas; Sevak Sharan's initiative, which has led to the revival of Vrindaban; and the Auroville Project of gardens and forests, which is guided by Narad (Richard Eggenberger). There is definitely a change from destruction to conservation, and presently even the possibilities of new creation as may be inferred from Ms Findly's picture of Auroville: 'The Green Belt is now flourishing with tree after tree received from the Matrimandir Gardens nursery—and many of the trees are now towering giants: massive, kingly trees, full of flowers and fragrances. Current generations of gardeners

have become very knowledgeable because of their work at Auroville, and their work is so good that bird and animal species counts are way up in the forested areas' (455).

The Vedic religions as also Buddhism and Jainism have played a very important part in educating common people on the importance of conserving nature. Though religious faith has had to take a backbench in modern times because of science, spiritual leaders have been taking over this task by inculcating in their devotees a deep respect for Nature, as is seen in the teachings and practical work of Karunamayai and Mata Amritanandamayai. The concluding section of the book takes us to Thailand, where the Buddhist focus on environment is pretty strong. The lesson is clear. As the author quotes Buddhadasa: 'Nature did not provide any of its various forms with the means of hoarding more resources than were necessary for survival and development. Birds, insects, trees—all consume only as much as Nature has given them the means to take in, a level of consumption perfectly adequate for their needs' (553).

Whether based on religion or science, any attempt to help us conserve nature must be welcomed heartily. Hence, let us give a warm greeting to *Plant Lives*.

Dr Prema Nandakumar
Researcher and Literary Critic
Srirangam



Upanishads in Daily Life
A Vedanta Kesari Presentation

Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, 2008.
vi + 314 pp. Rs 60.

This special *Vedanta Kesari* number, now available in book form, is a rich collection of twenty-seven articles from the powerful pens of Swamis Ashokananda, Ranganathananda, Sridharananda, Adiswarananda, and several other erudite monks as well as scholars and lay persons who have been living Vedanta. The message and power of the Upanishads, their key role in Indian culture, their forming the basis of world religions and providing the ideal of service, the relation of the Upanishads to yoga and modern science, and their reflection in the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, are all discussed in this valuable collection.

PB



The Spiritual Socialism of Swami Vivekanand

Dr Rajni Sharma

K K Publications, 618 Katra, Allahabad
211 002. 2007. 180 pp. Rs 350.

A study of Swami Vivekananda's spiritual humanism and his analysis of Indian social structures against the background of the concept of human being in Indian philosophy and the historical meaning of socialism. The author, who heads the department of philosophy at Vinoba Bhave University, Hazaribagh, also makes a brief comparative study of the socio-philosophical ideas of Vivekananda, Marx, and Gandhi and concludes that Swami Vivekananda's was a spiritual socialism rooted firmly in Vedanta.

PB

BOOKS RECEIVED



The Ecstasy of Divine Love: Essence of Narada Bhakti Sutra
Swami Shantananda Puri

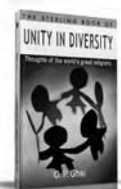
Parvathamma C P Subbaraju Setty Charitable Trust, 13/8 P M K Road, Shankarapuram, Bengaluru 560 004. E-mail: omkaroffset@gmail.com. 2009. xviii + 114 pp.

A simple and lucid discourse with practical hints on bhakti, its sadhana, and its attainments, based on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*.



Bhaja Govindam of Shankaracharya
Swami Gurudasananda

'Sreyas', Plot 53, 4 Street. Kulandai Ammal Nagar, Thanjavur 613 007. 2009. 88 pp. Rs 50.



The Sterling Book of Unity in Diversity
Comp. and ed. O P Ghai

Sterling Paperbacks. 2008. 134 pp. Rs 99.

A collection of illuminating thoughts from the world's great religious traditions on such diverse topics as anger, courage, immortality, justice, and love.

REPORTS



News from Branch Centres

Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, former president of India, felicitated the **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna**, for doing commendable service in prevention of blindness through its Sarada Netralaya eye-care centre. The announcement was made in the 'Vision 2020' meeting—a global initiative of WHO—on 17 July 2009. The meeting was attended by dignitaries of the state of Bihar, officials of WHO and the government of India, as well as representatives of various hospitals involved in eye care from all over India.



Dr A P J Abdul Kalam felicitating the Sarada Netralaya at Patna

Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, conducted state-wide quiz and elocution contests on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda, in collaboration with Ramakrishna Mission branch centres and unaffiliated centres in Andhra Pradesh from July to October. About 800 students in the age group 18 to 25 participated in the multi-round contests.



Medical camps at Nadi, Fiji

On 3 and 19 October **Ramakrishna Mission, Nadi, Fiji**, conducted two medical camps with the help of donors and volunteers. The camps provided free medical consultation and medicines to 160 needy patients of remote areas.

On 2 October **Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar**, organized a workshop on health awareness and a blood donation camp in which 66 donors participated. Sri Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister, Tripura, inaugurated both the programmes.

Information Integrity Coalition, an international body located in the US, selected **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow**, as one of the six finalists out of 125 nominees from 27 countries for the Excellence in Information Integrity Award in the non-profit category for the year 2009. Swami Muktinathananda, secretary of the institution, received the award at a function held in Northern Illinois University, Naperville, USA, on 17 November.

Achievements

Shrijan Kumar and Mayank Shubhankar, both class-9 students of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidya-pith, Deoghar**, secured first and second ranks respectively at the state level 'National Science Seminar Contest 2009' organized under the aegis



House where Swami Premananda stayed during his visit to Malda

through his hard work, determination, and the encouragement of monks was able to obtain this degree. Presently he is programme officer in the composing section of the Math's press.

New Street

The road in front of the house where Swami Premananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, stayed during his visit to **Malda** during May-June

1914 was named 'Swami Premananda Sarani' by the Malda Municipality on 26 November, the swami's birthday.

Relief

Flood Relief • Centres in Karnataka and West Bengal continued relief operations among flood victims. Details of the relief materials distributed are as follows. **Belgaum** and **Mysore**: 8,650 kg flour, 865 blankets, 1,730 cooking vessels, 1,730 ladles, 865 plates, and 1,730 bowls to 865 families of 2 villages in Gadag district. **Kamarpukur**: 100 saris, 50 dhotis, 65 shirts, 410 children's garments, and 200 blankets to 775 families of Khanakul II block in Hooghly district.

Cyclone Aila Relief • **Rahara** and **Sikra Kulingram** centres continued relief operations among the victims of the Aila Cyclone in West Bengal. Details of the relief materials distributed are as follows. **Rahara**: 63 kg biscuits, 51 kg coconut oil, and 1,000 blankets to 1,000 families of 3 villages in Sandeshkhali II block, North 24-Parganas district, during the month of November. **Sikra Kulingram**: 1,350 saris, 411 lungis, 33 dhotis, 98 shirts, 127 towels, 278 frocks, 215 assorted garments, 1,500 blankets, and 46 mosquito nets to 1,500 families of 59 villages in Sandeshkhali I and II blocks, North 24-Parganas district, during September-November.

of the National Council of Science Museums, Government of India, on 8 and 9 September at Ranchi.

Four students of **Vivekananda Veda Vidyalaya, Belur Math**, were awarded gold medals for securing all-India first ranks in Purva Madhyama (equivalent to class 10) and Uttara Madhyama (equivalent to class 12) examinations conducted by Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi, in 2008 and 2009. Their names are Ganesh Tudu and Shiladitya Halder, for the Purva Madhyama, and Soumyajit Sen and Aniruddha Kar for the Uttara Madhyama. In the Shastri (equivalent to BA—Honours in Sanskrit) examination conducted by the same institution in 2008, Ramesh R, a student of the Sanskrit College at **Ramakrishna Math, Palai**, was also awarded a gold medal for securing the all-India first rank. Sri Kapil Sibal, Union Minister for Human Resource Development, handed over the medals in the third convocation organized by the Sansthan at New Delhi on 12 September.

Atmakur Ramanaiah, a staff member of **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, was awarded PhD degree by the University of Madras for his thesis on 'Humanism of Swami Vivekananda' on 16 September. He joined the Math as a gatekeeper in 1985 and




Flood relief work at Kadapa

Winter Relief • The following centres distributed blankets and various winter garments to the needy in their respective areas: **Chapra:** 2,000 blankets, 875 sweaters, 700 caps, and scarves; **Malda:** 900 blankets; **Narainpur:** 900 sweaters and 900 woolen ear-bands; **Puri Math:** 100 blankets; **Purulia:** 1,500 blankets.

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to the needy in their respective areas: **Chandigarh:** 150 kg rice, 150 kg flour, 150 kg dal, 15 kg oil, 30 kg sugar, and 30 kg salt; **Chapra:** 1,200 kg sugar; **Cooch Behar:** 239 saris, 41 dhotis, and 8 lungis; **Guwahati:** 250 saris, 23 children's garments, and 65 steel plates; **Jalpaiguri:** 400 saris; **Malda:** 500 saris, 200 dhotis, and 2 rickshaw-trolleys; **Puri Math:** 26 packets of baby food, 51 soap bars, 39 toothbrushes, and 39 tubes of toothpaste; **Purulia:** 40 plastic sheets for spreading on the roofs of the huts and 116 sets of textbooks to poor students.

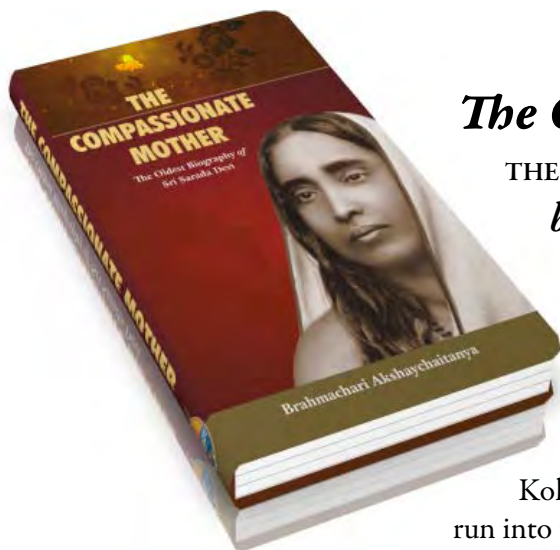
Free Eye Camps

Free eye camps are regularly conducted by many centres of the Ramakrishna Mission. A cumulative report is given in the table below, covering the period from 1 December 2008 to 30 November 2009. A total of 31,830 patients were treated and 6,730 free cataract surgeries were performed. 

Centre	Patients Treated	Surgeries Performed
Baranagar Math	60	21
Belgaum ¹	1,160	285
Chandigarh ¹	1,070	54
Chapra	19	11
Chengalpattu	248	13
Garbeta	1,243	151
Jamshedpur ¹	477	127
Kamarpukur	273	165
Limbdi	481	79
Lucknow	10,696	2,298
Madurai	203	0
Mayavati	465	84
Medinipur	217	57
Mumbai ¹	663	130
Narainpur	275	185
Porbandar	1,015	166
Rajkot	964	255
Ranchi Sanatorium	136	43
Salem	4,094	47
Saradapitha	1,118	125
Sikra Kulingram	140	37
Silchar ¹	1,854	474
Ulsoor	4,584	1,874
Vadodara	300	42
Visakhapatnam ¹	75	7
Total	31,830	6,730

¹ Includes data for November 2008

Correction • November 2009, p. 613: Read '*Brihatkatha* is a great collection of stories written by Gunadhya, who is reputed to have been a court poet of an Andhra Satavahana king' for '*Gatha-saptashati* is a great collection of stories written by an Andhra Satavahana King'.



The Compassionate Mother

THE OLDEST BIOGRAPHY OF SRI SARADA DEVI

by Brahmachari Akshaychaitanya

This is the English version of the first and the oldest complete biography of Sarada Devi—the Holy Mother. Originally titled *Sri Sri Sarada Devi* and authored by Brahmachari Akshaychaitanya, it was first published in Bengali in the year 1937 by the Kolkata Book House, Kolkata. The book has successfully

run into thirteen reprints since then, vouching for its popularity among the Bengali readers. The author was the disciple of the Mother.

First published in March 2002 from Persatuan Sri Ramakrishna Sarada Malaysia, Malaysia, under the title *The Compassionate Mother Sri Sri Sarada Devi*, the present book is its revised second edition brought out by us under the title *The Compassionate Mother—The Oldest Biography of Sri Sarada Devi*. Sarada Devi's life, with its apparent rustic simplicity, was an enigma even to those who lived in her proximity, so much more has it been so with the generations that followed her. We do not venture to speak here more about this personality, for which we invite the readers to peruse the book themselves.

pp. 396 | Rs. 100

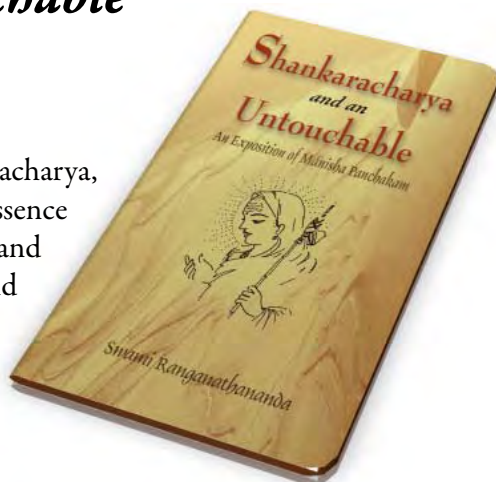
Packing & Postage: Rs. 30

Shankaracharya and an Untouchable

AN EXPOSITION OF MANISHA PANCHAKAM

by Swami Ranganathananda

The *Manisha Panchakam*, a set of five verses by Shankaracharya, has been read and interpreted by generations as the essence of Advaita Vedanta. An encounter between the saint and an untouchable provides the background to the text, and in his characteristic way, Swami Ranganathanandaji extracts a radical social message from this encounter. While educating the reader about the true import of Vedanta, this book can, to a great extent, help mitigate our social problems.



pp. 40 | Rs. 15

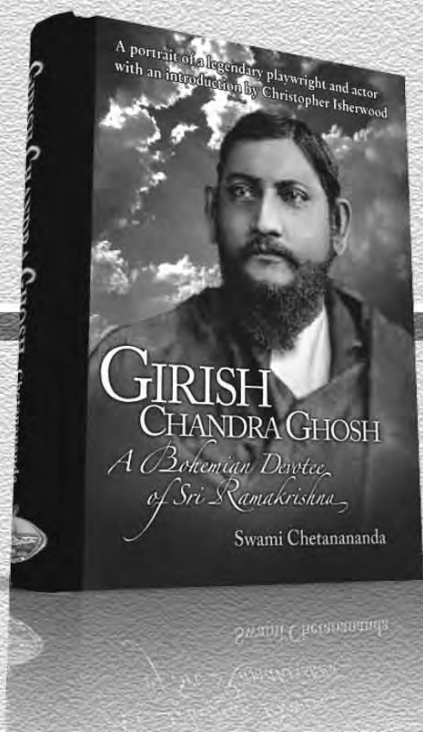
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Phones: 91-33-22644000 / 22640898 / 22862383, E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org



GIRISH CHANDRA GHOSH

*A Bohemian Devotee
of Sri Ramakrishna*
by Swami Chetanananda

Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844–1912) was the father of Bengali theatre. A massively successful playwright, composer, actor and director, he virtually single-handedly created the modern performing arts in northeastern India. But that's just a small part of his story.

'I am a sinner,' Girish told Ramakrishna frankly when the two met; he was a drunkard and a debauchee, but never a hypocrite. Their remarkable relationship is a classic story of redemption, as Ramakrishna's unconditional acceptance and gentle guidance transformed Girish from a committed atheist into a passionate lover of God.

In this new book of his Swami Chetanananda has exhaustively documented the life of Girish Chandra Ghosh for the English-speaking world.

pp. 496 | Rs. 160
Packing & Postage: Rs. 40



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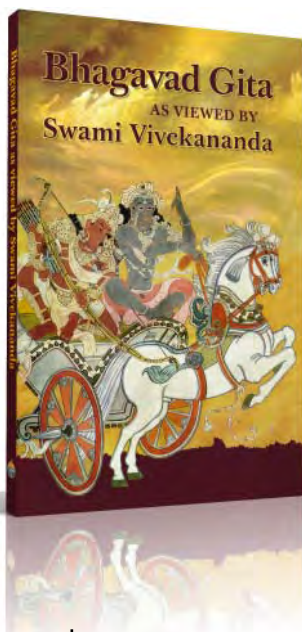
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Bhagavad Gita *as viewed by Swami Vivekananda*

Swami Vivekananda's views on the Gita are scattered throughout *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* published by us in nine volumes. The present book is a compilation of these views carefully accomplished by Swami Madhurananda of Advaita Ashrama. The compiler has classified Swami Vivekananda's comments according to the chapters and verses of the Gita. In consequence, the reader is taken through some of the verses of the Gita along with the Swami's commentary, as it were.

Pages: 160 | Packing & Postage: Rs. 30 | Price: Rs. 40



Please write to:

ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, India

Phones: 91-33-22644000 / 22640898 / 22862383, E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org